



# School Violence and Social Control Theory: An Evaluation of the Columbine Massacre

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## Abstract

*This paper will provide a brief analysis of past, present, and emerging research in reference to school violence, particularly in relation to school shootings, from the criminological perspective of Hirschi's (1969) Social Control Theory. Prior to the 1999 Columbine High School massacre and the most recent Virginia Tech rampage, research probing the etiology of school violence was virtually nonexistent. After Columbine, the nation frantically searched for answers as to how to intervene and prevent such a heinous atrocity from reoccurring in the future. This paper will not discuss the shooting incident at Virginia Tech University (April, 16, 2007) due to the fact that the shootings took place on a college campus, which do not share many of the same characteristics as the typical high school campus environment.*

*Key Words: Columbine school shooting; Hirschi's theories; social bond; social control;*

## Introduction

The study of youth violence emerged, in part, with the early research of several prominent Chicago School theorists, namely Park (1925), Burgess (1925), Shaw (1969), and McKay (1969), who collectively declared that human behavior, is heavily influenced by the social environment in which one resides. Although the ecological explanations of delinquency remain particularly strong to this very day, such environmental theories cannot adequately explain the behaviors and actions exhibited by the United States' most notorious school shooters.

The etiology of school violence, particularly school shootings, is far more complex than most other acts of youth violence in that school shooters appear to be an exclusive subpopulation of juvenile offenders who exhibit unique behavioral characteristics (Vossekuil, Reddy, & Fein 2000). As such, school shooters could conceivably be seen as a smaller subculture within a larger offender subculture. The typical school shooter does not fit the standard profile of a typical American juvenile offender who is, more times than not, a young, African American male from an impoverished, socially disorganized, inner

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city neighborhood rife with interpersonal violence (Schmalleger 2006). Most of the inner city violence stems from murderous street gangs, illicit drug use and abuse, and other vices that typically plagued most American urban neighborhoods. Unfortunately, many people hold this misperception concerning the perpetrators of school violence.

The vast majority of criminological theories that have been introduced over the past century have focused predominantly on one's socioeconomic status and, to some extent, one's geographic location within society as influential (external) determinants leading to crime and delinquency. Conversely, the typical American school shooter, based on numerous research findings, is a young, Caucasian male from a middle class community who attended an affluent suburban high school and had little to no history of aggressive or violent behavior prior to the actual shooting incident (National School Safety Center 2006).

More importantly, this paper will delve into the behavioral manifestations of Columbine shooters, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, whose collective behaviors and actions are representative of and, to a certain degree, mirror that of the majority of school shooters studied. This writer will illustrate how Hirschi's (1969) Social Control theory can be used as a reliable and valid psychosocial explanation of school violence, specifically in explaining the actions of the school shooter.

## **Part I. School Violence: Prevalence, Risk factors and Impact**

### ***a. Prevalence of School Violence***

Much of the research literature published to date in relation to school violence claims that youth violence has increased significantly over the past decade; however, despite that widely supported fact, school violence, particularly school-related homicides, are relatively rare (Meadows 2007). In fact, the probability of becoming a victim of a school-related homicide is roughly one in a million, thereby suggesting that the nation's schools are amongst the safest places for children (Meadows, 2007). Furthermore, school violence dropped from 48 violent victimizations per 1,000 students in 1992 to 28 violent victimizations in 2003 (National School Safety Center 2006). However, one cannot discount the powerfully negative emotional, psychological, and physical costs associated with bullying, drug abuse, gangs, and weapons on school grounds, which continue to be problematic and widespread (National School Safety Center 2006). According to Greene (2005), longitudinal studies have also shown that in addition to the aforementioned difficulties, students are continuously confronted with sexual harassment and biased attitudes, particularly in relation to homosexuality and racism.

### ***b. Risk Factors Associated with School Violence***

The risk factors associated with school violence are many, however, Meadows (2007) has created a comprehensive listing of eight risk factors that predispose some adolescents to school violence, particularly those with weakened internal and external controls. The first risk factor pertains to certain innate biological and psychological character risks including, but not limited to, neurological abnormalities, cognitive deficiencies, or psychiatric disorders such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Oppositional Defiant Disorder (Meadows 2007). Both disorders, as noted in the DSM-IV-TR, have been repeatedly linked to deviance and criminality in both

children and adolescents (American Psychiatric Association 2000). Nevertheless, the behavioral histories of the school shooters have varied according to Vossekuil, Reddy, and Fein (2000), with some exhibiting multiple problematic behaviors during adolescence whereas there were no previously known behavioral problems associated with the other shooters. The second risk factor pertains to the never-ending debate concerning the relationship, if any, between intelligence and criminality (Meadows 2007). A low IQ is often associated with deficiencies in social comprehension, problem-solving skills, impulsivity, and aggression, characteristics common amongst many criminals, but not necessarily the root source of criminality (Berry-Fletcher & Fletcher, 2003). As such, the research linking delinquency and crime to one's IQ has been largely inconclusive and therefore, not widely supported by many contemporary theorists.

The third risk factor pertains to the identification of early aggressive behaviors, specifically a child's violent temperament, which will undoubtedly worsen in the adolescent years if the aggressive behaviors are not addressed at an early age (Meadows 2007). The fourth risk factor, which essentially expands on the third risk factor, concerns certain family characteristics, specifically inappropriate, inconsistent, or harsh child rearing practices, parental neglect, or abandonment (Berry-Fletcher & Fletcher 2003; Meadows 2007). According to Berry-Fletcher and Fletcher (2003), the quality of one's child-rearing environment is highly influential in determining the developmental outcome of a number of psychiatric disorders, including ADHD and oppositional-defiant disorder.

The fifth risk factor pertains to the suggestive relationship between exposure to violence and victimization, particularly exposure to violence within the home or community (Meadows 2007). The sixth risk factor coincides with the fifth factor since it essentially coincides with the role of the media in exposing youths to violence and the suspected impact of observing such violence (Meadows 2007). Children exposed to high levels of violence on television are at an increased risk of accepting violence as normal in the sense that such exposure desensitizes the child and is especially powerful on those with a preexisting propensity toward aggression (Berry-Fletcher & Fletcher 2003).

For example, a 1993 study by the American Psychological Association estimated that the typical American child witnesses 33,000 murders on television by the time the child is age 18 (Berry-Fletcher & Fletcher 2003). The seventh risk factor is associated with the supposedly toxic culture of a society that has historically supported violence as a means to an end to resolve conflict (Meadows 2007). According to Honig (2002), today's students perceive the nation's schools to be plagued with drugs, gangs, and weapons, thereby leading to what has been coined a 'toxic' school environment.

The eighth and final risk factor proposes that schools are often a contributing source of violence in which overcrowding, high student-to-teacher ratios, a generally lax curriculum, poor academic student performance, and poorly designed school facilities that are not favorable to learning are partly to blame (Meadows 2007). This writer agrees with the aforementioned risk factors cited by Meadows (2007), however, there is one risk factor that Meadows did not cite even though it remains one of the most researched topics in relation to school violence, namely school bullying.

One cannot discuss the behavioral manifestations and psychosocial influences of school violence without addressing the topic of bullying, a pervasive social problem that is often dismissed as a customary rite of passage that students must unfortunately endure and hopefully overcome (Whitted & Dupper 2005). Contemporary research studies suggest that nearly half of all children have either witnessed or experienced a bullying incident at

least once, with upwards of 30% encountering such tormenting behavior on a regular, consistent basis (Whitted & Dupper 2005). The resulting harm may be either psychological or physical; however, bullying, by most accounts, is more psychological in nature (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry 2001). The bully uses various degrees of emotional intimidation or threats of physical violence to establish dominance and control over others, even though the victim's actions are largely unprovoked (Smokowski & Holland-Kopasz 2005). The research suggests that the majority of shooters were the victims of various degrees of bullying that occurred within the school (Greene 2005).

### ***c. Impact on the American Criminal Justice System and Social Policy***

The American criminal justice system, as a whole, is largely responsible for identifying, assessing, and managing those individuals who might pose an imminent or future threat of violence, regardless of whether the threat is real or perceived (Vosssekuil, Reddy, & Fein 2000). A simple Google search using the terms "school violence" will result in a number of articles that pertain mostly to school violence within the United States. When one compares the most recent school shootings across the globe, one will quickly notice that the vast majority of school shootings continue to occur within the United States. Since school violence places children in harm's way, disrupts the harmonious balance of the normally positive school environment, and jeopardizes the stability and cohesiveness of the community, it naturally influences the creation and direction of social policy, particularly in reference to minimizing crime (Pittaro 2007).

The school shooter's behaviors and actions are similar to that of the domestic terrorist who sets out to redress the perceived wrongs of a society, or in most cases, a select few who have ridiculed, belittled, demeaned, or even ostracized the individual to the point where revenge or retaliation are the primary motivators for the attack (Pittaro 2007). The Columbine shootings in particular sent shivers through the nation, which subsequently struggled to find a plausible explanation as to why two fairly normal teenagers would be willing to resort to such violence at the expense of many innocent victims. Harris and Klebold, like most of the other school shooters studied, formed a murder-suicide pact, which is virtually impossible to stop once the attack is set in motion, particularly if the shooters intend to die in the attack.

## **Part II. Columbian School Violence: Pre and post issues**

### ***1. Pre-Columbine Research in Reference to School Violence***

Prior to the Columbine tragedy, researchers concentrated mostly on environmental factors, gang influences, substance abuse, hormonal imbalances, neurological deficiencies, parental neglect, and peer abandonment as possible explanations for youth violence, including school violence (Meadows 2007). According to Meadows, anger stemming from within the home or the community is often displaced or projected into the school environment (2007). Most of the research conducted prior to Columbine concentrated on acts of violence that typically took place within the inner-city school districts where gangs have proliferated for decades within the school system (Meadows 2007). There is no disputing the fact that gangs remain an imminent threat to the safety and security of students, teachers, and school administrators (Meadows 2007). School

shootings, by most accounts, were rare occurrences, therefore, research efforts focused predominantly on inner-city school gang violence.

The nation's schools are constantly battling and challenged with the task of preventing drugs, guns, gangs, and violence from working their way into the nation's inner-city schools; however, the most notorious school shootings have not taken place within the inner-city schools but rather within the smaller, more affluent, suburban schools away from all the stereotypical vices of the city. In fact, a 1978 National Institute of Education study, the most comprehensive study of its time, concluded that 36% of all teenage robberies occurred within the nation's schools (Meadows 2007). Furthermore, a 1990 National School Safety Center study determined that the seriousness of school violence is more pronounced in communities with a population of more than 500,000, namely the urban inner city schools (Meadows 2007).

The research conducted prior to the 1999 Columbine shootings overwhelmingly supports the notion that students and teachers were more likely to be victims of school violence if one attended or worked within a poor urban school as opposed to an affluent suburban school. This is still a major concern expressed by many teachers today who often leave the urban school environment for the supposedly "safer" suburban school environment.

## ***2. Post-Columbine Research in Reference to School Violence***

On April 20, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, armed with an arsenal of weapons, confidently walked into Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado intent on killing dozens of students and teachers (Meadows 2007). In the aftermath of the mass shooting, 12 students and one teacher lay fatally wounded and dozens of others seriously injured, transposing the Columbine incident into one of America's deadliest high school shooting massacres in history (Meadows 2007). Even though youth violence has increased significantly over the past decade, the incidence of violence within the school environment is significantly lower than other acts of youth violence committed primarily within the community (Meadows 2007). Regardless, the widespread fear that followed the Columbine incident surged through the nation as students, parents, teachers, school officials, law enforcement, and community members frantically searched for answers as to how this could have occurred and what, if anything, could be done to prevent it from re-occurring in the future.

### **Part III. Explaining School Violence with Hirschi's Theories**

#### ***(i) Application of Travis Hirschi's Social Bond Theory***

Social control theories, by definition, are primarily concerned with understanding and determining why people obey the law and adhere to society's rules as opposed to the more widely-supported criminological theories concerned with determining why people break the law (Curran & Renzetti 2001). Control theorists argue that delinquent behaviors emerge when an individual's bonds or ties to conventional social institutions such as one's school, family, or community are severed or weakened; thereby making the individual more susceptible to the temptations of delinquency (Curran & Renzetti 2001).

The most recognizable and widely accepted of all social control theories is that of Travis Hirschi whose theory assumes that delinquency, for the most part, emerges when these social bonds are weakened or broken altogether (Curran & Renzetti 2001).



Conversely, the theory proposes that juveniles are simply less likely to engage in acts of delinquency if there is a strong attachment to family, school, and the community (Curran & Renzetti 2001). Hirschi (1969) introduced four elements of the social bond: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief, in his 1969 book, *Causes of Delinquency*.

Hirschi (1969) considered attachment to be the most important of the four elements because attachment signifies an individual's sensitivity and empathy toward others. School shooters lack this undeniably important element that, according to Hirschi (1969), facilitates in the development of an individual's conscience and overall compassion and empathy toward others. This is not evident in any of the school shooting incidents in which the shooters were willing to kill virtually anyone, including themselves, in the senseless path of destruction, regardless if the individual was a man, woman, or child, a perceived enemy, or even a close friend.

### ***(ii) Application of Hirschi's Theory to School Violence***

Most criminological theories suggest that social class is a contributing factor to juvenile delinquency; however, one of Hirschi's most important, yet controversial findings claims that there is no relationship between social class and reported delinquency, a secondary interpretation provided by Curran and Renzetti (2001). As noted, Hirschi (1969) relied on the four elements of a social bond to explain why some juveniles resort to delinquency. Since Hirschi considered attachment to be the most important of the four elements, it would be best to start with attachment using Harris and Klebold as an example to illustrate the significance of attachment in maintaining social control. Even though Harris and Klebold were supposedly raised in loving, supportive families both stated, in a videotaped confession, that each family would be devastated by what was about to occur (Bachman & Alvarez 2003). Further, both purposely planned the attack to take place in the school's cafeteria in anticipation that the cafeteria would be the best location for the attack due to the large number of students in attendance, which, in turn, would produce the most carnage and destruction (Bachman & Alvarez 2003).

As mentioned, attachment refers to an individual's sensitivity and empathy for the feelings of others. School shooters, for the most part, are angry with those who bullied, belittled, or ostracized the shooter for days, weeks, or months leading up to the attacks (Vossekuil, Reddy, & Fein 2000). The research suggests that shooters often create a list of potential targets, but are willing to take innocent lives in the process as demonstrated in the randomness of the typical shooter's aim and direction in the widespread attacks. This is very similar to the cognitive restructuring process that terrorists use to justify the killing of innocent lives (Bartol & Bartol 2006).

The second element is that of commitment, which pertains to the time and energy one spends pursuing a specific activity such as getting an education or a career (Hirschi 1969). School shooters, for the most part, do not anticipate getting away with the crime because the shooter has adopted a kill or be killed attitude and as such, is willing to take one's own life (Vossekuil, Reddy & Fein 2000). This is especially problematic for law enforcement because the planning that goes into an attack often involves taking one's life through suicide, a murder-suicide pact, or if necessary, suicide by cop (Vossekuil et al 2000).

The third element is that of involvement, which operates under the premise that if a person is engrossed in conventional social activities, that individual will simply not have

the time or desire to participate in delinquent acts (Hirschi 1969). While this may be true, most of the school shooters studied, including Harris and Klebold, spent a significant amount of time engaged in questionable online activities that included searching for information as to how to make pipe bombs and other explosives (Bailey 2002). Moreover, more than 50% of the perpetrators developed a plan of attack, including a list of targets, at least two weeks prior to the planned attack (Vossekuil, Reddy, & Fein 2000).

The fourth and final element is that of belief in which an individual believes in the social rules and laws of society (Hirschi 1969). Several studies support Hirschi's hypothesis in that the stronger one's moral beliefs in the social norms, the less likely one is to participate in delinquent or criminal activities (Curran & Renzetti 2001). Revenge was a motive in more than 50% of the school attacks because the perpetrators believed that retaliation was the only option available to redress the perceived wrongful behaviors and actions of others (Vossekuil, Reddy, & Fein 2000). Not only do most school shooters specifically target certain individuals, the school shooters, like terrorists, are more than willing to kill innocent students, civilians, and law enforcement in the process without any sense of guilt or remorse (Vossekuil et al 2000).

### ***(iii) A Critique of Hirschi's Theory***

To fully understand and appreciate the paradigm from which Hirschi constructed his theory, it is important to recognize the historical context from which he wrote *Causes of Delinquency* (1969). In the 1960s, American society was growing tiresome of the social disorganization perspective of criminology that had been previously dominating criminological thought (Welch 1998). At the same time, Hirschi was observing a loss of social control over individuals. Social institutions, such as organized religion, the family, educational institutions, and political groups lost favor while the advent of rock and roll, drugs, and the civil rights movement encouraged individuals to sever ties with conventional social norms (Welch 1998).

Hirschi (1969) blamed the family breakdown, rather than social disorganization, for society's growing ills. The four components of conformity and deviation have encountered considerable criticism mostly because they do not seem to explain all types of crime (Welch 1998). Though this version of social control theory is still prominent in modern society, it has faced many criticisms (Welch 1998). Hirschi himself, especially regarding the origin of his theory, has even furnished some of these critiques. His own personal support of this theory has waned over time, and eventually incited the development of the control theory presented in *A General Theory of Crime* (Gottfredson & Hirschi 1990).

## **Part IV. Criminal Justice responses and Failed interventions**

### ***1. Explanation of Current Criminal Justice Responses to School Violence***

In this writer's opinion, the criminal justice system's response to school violence has not been effective primarily because the policies and procedures that have been adopted in response to the highly publicized shootings were created and subsequently implemented in haste without any true forethought or planning. The Columbine incident, although undeniably tragic, was an isolated incident in that the same year it occurred, school-based violence, specifically homicide, dropped nearly 40% (Garcia 2003). Regardless, the criminal justice system responded by partnering with school administrators

across the country in a sweeping target hardening campaign with the intention of securing the safety of the nation's schools from future Columbine-like attacks (Garcia 2003).

Stringent zero-tolerance policies were created and implemented without any true consideration of the unintended consequences of such punitive policies. As a rule, zero-tolerance policies call for mandatory expulsion and, in some cases, criminal charges lodged against violators of the school-wide policy (Garcia 2003). Local, state, and federal law enforcement have willingly volunteered to assist school officials in the development of elaborate evacuation procedures in the event of a future attack (Garcia 2003). Even more controversial were the installation of metal detectors, armed security personnel, and security cameras dispersed throughout the school to deter and hopefully thwart off a potential attack (Garcia 2003). Hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent on such target hardening activities even though most have not been proven effective in deterring or minimizing school violence (Garcia 2003). Empirical evidence regarding the efficacy of such stringent measures has been largely inconclusive and, according to some, partly responsible for subsequent incidences of violence due to the security-conscious structural design of most contemporary American schools.

## ***2. Ill-fated Attempts to Intervene and Prevent School Violence***

Not only are teachers and school administrators ill informed and therefore, ill prepared to tackle school violence, most are fearful of being sued if one intervenes in the hopes of obstructing a suspected or planned attack (Meadows 2007). After the Columbine attack, many school districts collaborated with local, state, and federal law enforcement to create an offender profile of a school shooter only to discover soon thereafter that there is no accurate or practical profile to identify a potential shooter (Vossekuil et al 2000).

The age of the attackers varied in that the age ranged anywhere from 11 to 21 years old (Vossekuil et al 2000). The racial and ethnic backgrounds of the perpetrators also varied, although the majority of the offenders were Caucasian adolescent boys whose academic performance varied from failing to earning high honors (Vossekuil et al 2000). Some perpetrators were raised in a perceivably normal two-parent home whereas others were raised in unstable homes immersed in dysfunctional parenting, inappropriate, inconsistent, or harsh child rearing practices, neglect, and abandonment (Vossekuil et al 2000).

Prior to the majority of school shooting incidents, the perpetrator in three-quarters of the cases studied told at least one person, generally a friend, schoolmate, or sibling, about the idea or plan of mounting an attack at the school (Vossekuil et al 2000). It is important to differentiate between making and posing a threat in that making a threat involves telling another about the proposed plan to harm someone whereas a posed threat involves the actual planning and preparation of an attack (Vossekuil et al 2000).

## **Part V. Recommendations**

### ***i. Creation, Adoption, and Implementation of Threat Assessment Policies***

In response to the recent school shootings, particularly Columbine, it has been highly suggested or, in many cases, required that schools create, adopt, and subsequently implement a threat assessment plan in the hopes of preventing or, at the very least, minimizing the potential for school violence. Most of the policies created immediately following the Columbine incident were implemented in haste without any true



forethought or insight into the unintended consequences of such action on the school environment, particularly its students (Bailey 2002). School administrators are unfortunately confronted with designing a comprehensive plan that successfully balances the safety and security of the school environment with that of a student's privacy, autonomy, and constitutional right to a quality education. Shifting this delicate balance in either direction could prove disastrous for the school environment. An ideal threat assessment plan is one that is fact-based and analytical in that focuses on the student's behaviors, actions, and communications rather than the student's outward physical appearance (Vossekuil et al 2000).

### ***ii. Anti-Bullying Prevention Strategies***

As repeatedly mentioned, bullying is a pervasive social problem that Meadows equates to child abuse by one's peers, a powerful, yet incredibly accurate illustration to describe such antisocial behaviors often associated with violence (2007). Zero-tolerance policies, although controversial when applied to domestic violence situations, are appropriate and effective in eradicating school violence; particularly school bullying (Meadows 2007). Nearly two-thirds of all the offenders studied by Vossekuil, Reddy, and Fein (2000) were bullied prior to the incident (Vossekuil et al 2000). It should be emphasized that even though bullying was present in two-thirds of the cases, not every child who is bullied and tormented by one's peers will resort to such violence; however, it is imperative that school officials promote anti-bullying initiatives and establish zero-tolerance policies to expeditiously address bullying incidents to reduce the potential for retaliatory violence.

### ***iii. Embracing Diversity and Multiculturalism within the School Culture***

In addition to establishing the legality of a school-wide policy, school administrators must continuously work toward fostering a school culture that embraces diversity and nurtures a value and belief system that respects multicultural issues in relation to one's race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and sexual orientation. Many schools exhibit what Chapin and Gleason (2004) refer to as optimistic bias in that school officials adopt an attitude of "it won't happen here" approach to addressing school violence. Adopting this type of attitude can prove disastrous for a school that is ill prepared to handle a school shooting because it lacks a specific protocol to deal with such violence. Schools must create a positive culture that respects individuality and embraces differences in race, culture, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation.

## **Conclusion**

### ***a) Where We are Today***

In response to the Columbine massacre and other highly publicized school shootings, many schools have created stringent zero-tolerance policies that are intended to prevent school-based attacks even though the literature appears to suggest that these policies are not likely to be as effective as originally anticipated (Reddy et al 2001). Zero tolerance policies tend to be overly punitive and have the potential to unfairly label or stigmatize some students; thereby infringing on the students' constitutionally guaranteed rights to a quality education (Reddy et al 2001). Moreover, research pertaining to peer harassment, namely bullying, and victimization has captured the attention of researchers who have recommended that teachers understand the characteristic symptoms and risks

associated with physical, verbal, and relational peer aggression (Bauman & Del Rio 2006). It should also be emphasized that teachers play an important role in fostering a positive school culture. Students have a tendency not to approach a teacher unless the teacher has gained the trust and admiration of the students.

**b) *Where We Need to Go Tomorrow***

Local and state law enforcement should be involved at all stages of the threat assessment planning and policy development process even though most school shootings have ended before law enforcement could respond (Vossekuil et al 2000). Sadly, most school shooting incidents have lasted 20 minutes or less (Vossekuil et al 2000). Therefore, the best course of action would be for schools to dedicate virtually all available school resources on prevention efforts rather than relying on law enforcement alone to resolve school-based attacks (Vossekuil et al 2000). Ninety-three percent of the past 41 school shooters planned the attack at least two days before the murders took place with revenge being the primary motive in 61% of the attacks (Reddy et al 2001).

Educating the public and providing awareness to school officials, teachers, students, parents, and community members is critical. Education should begin with the fact that there is no single, accurate shooter profile and any profile that has been created carries with it a considerable risk of false positives associated with what is referred to as prospective profiling (Reddy et al 2001). In other words, some adolescents may fit the profile but will never engage in such violence (Reddy et al 2001). One must be extremely cautious not to infringe upon an individual's constitutionally guaranteed right to privacy. It should also be noted that most of the perpetrators studied had no history of violent or criminal behavior prior to the shooting incident (Reddy et al 2001).

The second concern associated with prospective profiling is that the accuracy of such profiling is questionable (Reddy et al 2001). For one, the information used to create a school shooter profile has been limited to a relatively small number of shooters. For instance, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) profile is only based on information gathered from six school shootings whereas the others, including the exhaustive United States Secret Service study, is based on the acts of only 41 shooters (Reddy et al 2001). The only accurate descriptive characteristic used to date is that all of the shooters have been young males (Reddy et al 2001). As such, the use of profiles is both ineffective and inefficient; therefore, it would be best to employ a deductive, fact-based approach that focuses on planning behaviors, communications, motives, and idea development (Sprague & Walker 2002).

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