

# Adolescent Rampage School Shootings: Responses to Failing Masculinity Performances by Already-Troubled Boys

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**Abstract** This research considers the role of failing masculinity in rampage school shootings committed by adolescents. Examined is the thesis that these young shooters experience a discrediting of their enactment of a traditional normative masculinity, wellknown in U.S. culture and particularly salient in boys' achievement of insider status in middle and high school; viewing their classmates' rebuffs as undeserved injustices, the boys become increasingly angry and more violent in their gendered practice, culminating in the rampage school shooting. Data from a sample of all identifiable adolescent rampage school shooters in the U.S. from 1995 through 2015 (31 shooters, 29 shootings) who met the definitional criteria were examined for ways in which factors linked to school shooters in the research literature are gendered and reflected in the shooters' social performances at school. Also explored were personal troubles of school shooters identified in prior research that might contribute to the boys' gendered failings, and to the rampage itself. Results support the above thesis, as well as the existence of sub-groupings differentiated by type of personal trouble. These sub-groupings also differed in the distribution and intensify of insider masculinity-related behaviors, including the planning and execution of the shooting itself. Based on the findings from this study, interventions for the prevention of adolescent rampage school shootings are suggested.

**Keywords** Rampage · School · Shootings · Adolescents · Masculinity

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## Introduction

On the morning of April 20th, 1999, armed with two shotguns, a rifle, a semi-automatic pistol, a half dozen knives, and close to 100 explosive devices, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold walked into their high school cafeteria in Littleton, Colorado and began their mass shooting. In some 15 min, they had killed 13 people and wounded another 21. As the police arrived, they completed their double suicide pact. Although concern had been mounting in the mid-to-late 1990s over a spate of adolescent school shootings in which a student appeared to shoot randomly at multiple classmates (and sometimes teachers), it was Columbine that became the standard bearer of a feared “epidemic” of what came to be referred to as rampage school shootings. Accompanying the panic were attempts to explain the rampages’ cause in broad terms, e.g., a crisis in youth culture, exposure to violent media, bullying, mental illness. Initially, in spite of its obviousness, the one trait shared by the shooters failed to get much attention: they were virtually all male.

Since that time, a notable literature focusing on gender in the analysis of rampage school shootings has emerged (see, for example, [12–15, 17, 18, 33]). Prominent among these works are explorations of links between violence and norms of masculinity. Katz and Jhally ([13], p. 2) assert that these shootings highlight “the construction of violent masculinity as a cultural norm”. And, in considering boys’ options in defense of their gendered self, Kalish and Kimmel ([12], p. 452) contend that the culture of a dominant masculinity to which American boys are exposed “encourages the use of violence to avenge a perceived challenge to their masculine identity”. Further, they note, emasculation is the primary source of, even synonymous with, boys’ feelings of shame and humiliation. Gender becomes particularly salient for boys as they move into adolescence. During this period of “gender intensification”, the importance of masculine imperatives may escalate and deepen [9, 11]. According to Pascoe ([35], p. 5), adolescent boys must be regularly vigilant in their gender performance at school as it involves “the repeated repudiation...of failed masculinity”.

The great majority of adolescent school shooters are also white and heterosexual—bearers of triple privilege by birth. According to Madfis ([24], p. 67), the denial of such entitlements makes “subsequent life course losses more unexpected and thus more painfully shameful...”. Leading up to the rampage, these boys become, in O’Toole’s [34] words, “injustice collectors”. Kalish and Kimmel ([12], p. 454) argue that “aggrieved entitlement”, a gendered emotional reaction to perceived injustices, “inspires revenge against those who have wronged you” and legitimates your rampage. Many of the shooters, the authors note, complete the rampage with suicide, underscoring “the violent enactment of masculinity” [p. 451].

A number of the traits common to adolescent school shooters are associated with masculinity. For example, the shooters tend to suffer from emasculating bullying by their male classmates, embrace themes of intense violence in their writings and recreational choices, idolize violent anti-heroes, display an excessive interest in guns and other weapons, and come from gun-owning families. They are typically on

at least one adult's radar screen for some misbehavior (e.g., fights, threatening behaviors) and are likely to have told, even bragged to, classmates about their rampage desires and plans (see [6, 10, 20, 21, 23, 28, 29, 32, 39, 43–45]). Research literature also points to a gender component to anger control, a common problem among adolescent school shooters. Studies have found boys to be more likely than girls to express anger outwardly, feel comfortable expressing anger, use destructive and physical mechanisms for coping with anger, have a revenge motive for their anger, and react to anger with impulsivity [1, 5, 8, 32]. In his study of gender differences in anger, Boman [1] found that boys felt greater hostility toward school and had less confidence in school adults than did girls.

Early research on school shooters suggests that assailants typically come from dysfunctional families [26], but later studies found insufficient evidence to support this claim [22]. In his categorization of school shooters as one of three types (psychotic, psychopathic, and traumatized), Langman [20] emphasizes the prevalence of personal troubles, especially psychiatric ones. However, experts disagree on the role of mental illness in shooters' rampage attacks.

## The Study

### Conceptual Framework

The above arguments and descriptive findings on rampage school shooters and shootings serve as the foundation for the study presented here. The thesis is that adolescent rampage school shooters have been failing in their masculinity performances at school and that such failings are reflected in the ways in which peers treat them. At the same time, the shooters perceive their classmates' put-downs as injustices that deny them their gendered entitlements. Confronted with both a recognition of their social failings and their belief that they were being treated unfairly by their peers, the shooters become increasingly angry, depressed, and more violent in their gendered practice. The rampage is their ultimate performance. My intent in this study is to determine how well this failing masculinity thesis stands up when applied to a full population of adolescent school shooters.

In western societies, boys are typically exposed to a set of norms that serve as guidelines for the enactment of a traditional masculinity. Such norms are pervasive in American culture, and, as Pollack [37] notes, most boys know them well by the time they start school. Robert Brannon's [2] "four rules of masculinity" capture the essence of these norms: the first, "no sissy stuff", refers to the repudiation of all that is feminine; the second, "give 'em hell", instructs boys and men to be aggressive, bold and daring; the third and fourth provide role models: the "big wheel" engages in public practices that showcase his tangible successes, and the "sturdy oak" is independent, stable, and always in control. In turn, Brannon's four stereotypes form the basis of Pollack's [37] "boy code", components of which include "not showing your feelings", "acting tough", and "being cool". Similar to Brannon's and Pollack's' masculinity norms, but focused on late adolescence and young adulthood,

is Kimmel's ([16], pp. 44–45) “guy code”. From his conversations with young men around the country, Kimmel concluded that the “unifying emotional subtext [of the code] involves never showing emotions or admitting to weakness”. Among his “Real Guy's Top Ten List” are such imperatives as “it's better to be mad than sad”, “get even”, “take it like a man”, “boys don't cry”, and “just do it”. The code reflects not only what it means to be a guy, but more pointedly to be a guy's guy. As Kimmel notes, men attempt to conform to the code in order to be viewed positively by other men.

In the world of adolescent schoolboys, power and preeminence are largely obtained (or not) on the basis of one's social standing in the school hierarchy. I argue that the above depictions serve as the foundation for a model of traditional masculinity by which adolescents in the United States typically judge the social standing of their male classmates. From these depictions, I have selected four defining categories for this model, which I will hereafter refer to as Adolescent Insider Masculinity (AIM). The categories and elaborations of them are:

- Being cool* embracing “guy things” (activities, mindsets, mannerisms, appearances); “hangin” with the guys
- Proving heterosexuality* successful romantic and sexual relationships with girls
- Repudiating femininity* no “sissy stuff”, no crying
- Being tough* better to be mad than sad, take it like a man, give ‘em hell, get even, be aggressive

### **Performance Difficulties: Being Cool, Proving Heterosexuality, Repudiating Femininity, Being Tough**

The enactment of these norms can be fraught with challenges for boys and young men. To begin, the norms may be less than clear regarding the nature of practices that fulfill them. Take, for instance, “being cool”, of particular importance in the achievement of Adolescent Insider Masculinity status. While some parts of being cool (e.g., the embrace of “boy things” such as competitive sports, action films; hangin’ with the guys) are ubiquitous, other parts (e.g., attire, postures, mannerisms, language) are much more variable across geographic sites [35].

Relatedly, issues around masculinity and sexuality are complex. AIM norms strongly endorse heterosexuality. Rejection by a girlfriend can damage a boy's gender esteem, but expressing emotional grief over such a rejection can be seen as feminine, thus discrediting. Additionally, calling another boy a “fag” or “homo” is doubly emasculating in that homo-epithets have both a stigmatized sexual and gender connotation. In middle and high schools, homo-epithets are also used to further emasculate a boy by denouncing him as geeky, nerdy, or simply not cool [32, 33, 35].

Practices are also complicated by strains and contradictions in the norms [36]. For example, Dadatsi's [7] study of Greek high school boys' accounts of what masculinity means to them revealed two repertoires: the “macho repertoire” features the boys' descriptions of what boys are actually like and what they do with

their male peers; the other, the “sophisticated repertoire”, involves more mature and rational norms, e.g., being responsible, respecting morality. The AIM norms emphasize the macho repertoire, but the sophisticated repertoire has standing as well.

## Methodology

The population under study consists of adolescent students in the U.S. whose shootings were carried out at their school or a school-connected site between 1995 and 2015, and whose intent was to shoot multiple members of the school populace. For this study, then, rampage school shootings consist of incidents in which:

- \* The attacked school was a high, middle, or elementary school
- \* The shooter was a current or former student at the school and under age 21
- \* The shooting took place in the school, on the school grounds, or at a school event
- \* The shooter shot at two or more people, at least one of whom was a student, or shot at or into a group or gathering that included at least one student
- \* At least one of the persons shot or shot at was not a specifically-targeted victim

After examining multiple lists of primary and secondary school shootings (e.g., [3, 19, 30, 32, 43, 46, 47]), I found 29 shootings perpetrated by 31 shooters that met my criteria. All of the shooters were male. For data on adolescent rampage school shootings in the U.S., I searched *Sociological Abstracts* and *Criminal Justice Abstracts* for works published from 1994 through 2015; the former yielded 68 items, of which I found 24 to be applicable to my study; the second listed 38 items, 12 of which were applicable. Additional applicable articles were uncovered in the reference sections of documents identified from the *Abstract* searches. Another data source was the list of 74 references (29 of which were applicable) cited in Roque’s [39] literature review article on rampage school shootings. Items deemed inapplicable most commonly focused on youth violence or deviant behavior in general; theories of crime; college or international school shootings; media representations of school shootings; after-effects of shootings on witnesses or victims; or suggestions for first responders or school security mechanisms.

For data on individual shooters and shootings, I relied heavily on websites that report school shooting data. Peter Langman’s website, schoolshooters.info [19], included information on all but one of the shooters in the study (although data were limited to the facts of the case on four other shooters). LexisNexis, searched by shooter name, provided listings for all but five of the shooters. The number of listings on this site varied widely by shooter; for the heavily publicized cases ( $n = 10$ ), the number of items ranged from the high to low hundreds; at the other extreme were eleven cases with from 36 to 7 listings. Finally, I included data on the 26 shooters and shootings individually described on the Wikipedia website. For each of the several shooters on whom there were limited data from the above sources, I was able to retrieve a handful of articles from a Google Scholar search. The collection of data on each of the shooters continued until I had exhausted my

sources and/or was finding no new information. Informed by my review of the literature on adolescent rampage school shootings, I also compiled a list of rampage-linked phenomena and then examined each of my cases for evidence of these traits, along with their gender implications.

The data on the shooters and shootings consist largely of qualitative descriptions and accounts of the shooters' rampage-related attitudes and behaviors, provided most commonly by the shooters themselves, or by their classmates, teachers, neighbors and family members. As such, the study fits Schutt's [41] description of a case-oriented approach, which aims at understanding a social phenomenon "from the standpoint of the participants" and in which a large body of data is collected on a small number of cases. Additionally, many of the findings are expressed through direct quotations, a practice increasingly supported by a number of researchers, who claim that verbatim quotations facilitate interpretations of the data [42]. Findings are also described through frequencies and percentages. Although often ignored in the "mixed-methods" literature, there is a long tradition in social research of quantifying qualitative data with descriptive statistics [25]. As has been noted [41], qualitative data are readily converted into quantitative data through categorization and counting. In their article on qualitative analysis, Moreira and Costa ([27], p. 2) point out that when one examines and questions data "from a qualitative perspective, it is in the quantitative nature of the building of patterns that we can lay the foundations for interpreting such patterns...". Moreover, they continue, "because we are categorizing extracts, excerpts, words, sentences, or whatever measure of texts, we are actually establishing patterns that account for tendencies. These can only be explained in terms of recurrence and therefore in terms of quantity".

There are caveats. The volume and depth of data varied from case to case, and at times accounts of a particular case varied. Shootings in which few people were shot and no one was killed garnered less and less-detailed attention [31]. Moreover, only in cases where a given descriptor was verifiable (came from the shooter or more than one other source) was it recorded as affirmed. Additionally, many of the shooters' provided particularly illuminating "after-the-fact" explanations of their decision to attack their school, accounts missing from the eleven shooters who committed suicide following their rampage.

## Results

### Sub-groupings: A Prologue

Findings confirmed the existence of shared characteristics identified in prior studies. Upon further examination, the data also revealed what I refer to as personal trouble clusters within the sample: ten of the shooters shared a history of serious psychiatric problems; another ten had spent most of their young lives in extremely abusive households; the remaining eleven boys exhibited a tendency to react to incidents that they perceived as an unjust discrediting of them with inappropriate and explosive anger. I have labeled these three groupings in accordance with these

personal troubles: Psychiatric Disorder (PSYCH), Family Turbulence (FAMILY), and Situational Volatility (VOLATILE). There were some overlaps: for instance, one of the PSYCH shooters was living in a severely dysfunctional family, and at least three of the FAMILY/VOLATILE shooters may have had more serious psychiatric problems than were recognized by adult professionals and family members during their young lives. Yet confidence in the relevance of these groupings was elevated as the ongoing analysis revealed rampage- and AIM-related variations among them.

### **Commonalities: Shooter and Shooting Characteristics**

Table 1 lists the 31 shooters by personal troubles grouping, selected demographics, and the number of victims. Twenty-five of the shooters were white; four were full or part Native American, and two were Hispanic. All but one of the boys identified as heterosexual. Three quarters of the shooting sites were high schools, all but two located in rural or suburban towns. One hundred eighty-three (85.5%) of the 214 shooting victims were students; another 25 (11.7%) were teachers or school staff, and the remaining six were family members, shot at home prior to the school rampage (data not shown).

As shown in Table 2, there were numerous gender-related commonalities among the 31 shooters. All of the shooters reported some combination of Adolescent Insider Masculinity problems. Most were repeatedly and publicly tagged by male peers with homosexual and feminized epithets challenging their masculinity, e.g., fag, homo, weak, cry-baby; some reported physical and sexualized victimization perpetrated by male peers. The majority of the shooters expressed feelings of social isolation or marginalization. In turn, classmates reported having mixed or negative feelings about the overwhelming majority of the boys. Additionally, over half of the shooters were clearly upset by a recently-experienced rejection by a girlfriend or girlfriends and/or held negative attitudes toward girls in general. Overall, the great majority complained about classmates' and teachers' efforts to undermine their efforts to achieve the AIM status to which they believed they were entitled.

Most responded to their problems with dramatic displays of masculine bravado, such as bringing guns to school to show their classmates and emphasizing violent themes in their writings, drawings, and class presentations. Also, almost all had told someone of, even bragged about, their rampage plans and were on some adult's radar screen for past or potential worrisome behaviors. Moreover, these young shooters often expressed their anger in front of their classmates and, although anger is not a feature of AIM per se, it is often viewed as a sign of masculine bravado. As Dittman ([8], p. 52) points out, "... it is seen as 'manly when men engage in fistfights or act their anger out physically'". In addition to anger, most suffered from depression (over ½ had at some time taken prescription psychotropic medication). The great majority had repeatedly experienced suicidal ideation and/or attempted suicide at some point in their lives.

**Table 1** Shooters by grouping, by selected demographics, minority race (native American or Hispanic), and number of shooting victims

	Age	Shot	Killed	Year	Year and location of shooting	
<i>Psychiatric Disorder (PSYCH) (n = 10)</i>						
Karl Pierson*	18	1	1	2013	Arapahoe HS, Centennial, CO	Suburb
Adam Lanza*	20	27	27	2012	Sandy Hook ES, Newtown, CT	Suburb
Alvaro Castillo (H)	18	2	1	2006	Orange HS, Hillsborough, NC	Rural
Eric Harris*	18	34	13	1999	Columbine HS, Littleton, CO	Suburb
Dylan Klebold*	17			1999	Columbine HS, Littleton, CO	
Kip Kinkel	15	26	4	1998	Thurston HS, Springfield, OR	Suburb
Andrew Wurst	14	4	3	1998	Parker MS, Edinboro, PA	Rural
Andrew Golden	11	8	3**	1997	Westside MS, Jonesboro, AR	Rural
Michael Carneal	14	8	3	1997	Heath HS, West Paducah, KY	Rural
Luke Woodham <sup>+</sup>	16	10	3	1997	Pearl HS, Pearl, MI	Suburb
Mean age, total shot/killed	16.1	120	58			
<i>Family Turbulence (FAMILY) (n = 10)</i>						
Robert Gladden	15	1	0	2012	Perry Hall HS, Perry Hall, MD	Suburb
Thomas (T.J.) Lane <sup>+</sup>	17	6	3	2012	Chardon HS, Chardon, OH	Suburb
Asa Coon*	14	4	0	2007	Success Tech HS, Cleveland, OH	Urban
Jeffrey Weise* (NA)	16	14	9	2005	Red Lake HS, Red Lake, MN	Rural
Jason Hoffman* <sup>+</sup>	18	5	0	2001	Granite Hills HS, El Cajon, CA	Suburb
Thomas (T.J.) Solomon <sup>+</sup>	15	6	0	1999	Heritage HS, Conyers, GA	Rural
Mitchell Johnson	13	7	2	1997	Westside MS, Jonesboro, AR	Rural
Evan Ramsey <sup>+</sup> (NA)	16	4	2	1997	Bethel Regional HS, Bethel, AK	Rural
Barry Loukaitis <sup>+</sup>	14	4	3	1996	Frontier MS, Moses Lake, WA	Rural
James Rouse	17	3	2	1995	Richland HS, Lynville, TN	Rural
Mean age, total shot/killed	15.5	54	21			
<i>Situational Volatility (VOLATILE) (n = 11)</i>						
Jaylen Fryberg* <sup>+</sup> (NA)	15	6	4	2014	Mv. Pilchuck HS, Marysville, WA	Rural
Jared Padgett*	15	2	1	2014	Reynolds HS, Troutdale, OR	Suburb
Mason Campbell	12	2	0	2014	Berrendo MS, Roswell, NM	Suburb
Bryan Oliver <sup>+</sup>	16	2	0	2013	Taft Union HS, Taft, CA	Rural
Jose Reyes* (H)	12	3	1	2013	Sparks, MS, Sparks, NM	Suburb
James Newman	14	2	0	2006	Pine MS, Reno, NV	Urban
Jon Romano	16	1	0	2004	Columbia HS, E. Greenbush, NY	Suburb
Andrew Williams	15	15	2	2001	Santana HS, Santee, CA	Suburb
Seth Trickey (NA)	13	4	0	1999	Fort Gibson MS, Fort Gibson, OK	Rural
Colt Todd	14	2	0	1997	Stamps HS, Stamps, AR	Rural
Douglas Bradley*	16	1	0	1996	Mid-Peninsula HS, Palo Alto, CA	Suburb
Mean age, total shot/killed	14.4	40	8			

\* Shooter committed suicide

\*\* Total # victims in this shooting: shot 15, killed 5; for sub-group distributional purposes, Golden, thought to have been the more prolific, is listed as having shot 8, killed 3; Johnson (FT) as having shot 7, killed 2. The number shot by Harris and Klebold, is also unclear

<sup>+</sup> Shooter did (or likely did) shoot or shoot at an intended victim

**Table 2** Masculinity issues and personal troubles, by Psychiatric Disorder, Family Turbulence and Situational Volatility Groupings, by frequency

	Total (n = 31)	Psych (n = 10)	Family (n = 10)	Volatile (n = 11)
<i>Masculinity issues</i>				
Indicators of failure				
Some adolescent insider masculinity problem	31 (100.0%)	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>
Called fag, weak, not masc by male peers	23 (74.2%)	<u>8</u>	<u>10</u>	5
Bullied or bullied and bully	18 (58.1%)	4	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>
Bullied, not bully	10 (32.3%)	0	5	5
Peers' feelings on shooter mixed/negative	20/6 (83.9%)	<u>5/4</u>	<u>8/2</u>	<u>7/0*</u>
Problems girlfriend or girls in general	17 (54.8%)	<u>9</u>	<u>6</u>	2*
Victim sex abuse or sexual "pranks"	8 (25.8%)	1	4	3
Long-term academic, learning problem	10 (32.3%)	1	<u>8</u>	1*
Current academic problems	12 (38.7%)	<u>6</u>	4	2
Recognition of failure				
Anger problem (self-report, displayed)	30 (96.8%)	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>
Felt isolated or marginalized	22 (71.0%)	<u>9</u>	<u>8</u>	5
Felt others thought him weird, scary, ugly	13 (41.9%)	<u>6</u>	5	2*
Felt crazy, not well (self-report)	12 (38.7%)	<u>8</u>	2	2
On some adult's radar screen	27 (87.1%)	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>7</u>
Enactments and performance efforts				
Displays of bravado	24 (77.4%)	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>7*</u>
Spoke, displayed signs of entitlement	23 (74.2%)	<u>10</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7*</u>
Told, hinted of rampage plans	27 (87.1%)	<u>10</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>8</u>
Recruits, accomplices, or encouragers	10 (32.3%)	<u>6</u>	3	1
Referred to prior mass shootings	16 (51.6%)	<u>9</u>	4	3
Referred to anti-heroes	11 (35.5%)	<u>6</u>	4	1
Obsession themes of violence	15 (48.4%)	<u>10</u>	3	2*
Loved guns and/or other weaponry	18 (58.1%)	<u>9</u>	<u>6</u>	3*
Arsenal and/or multiple guns to shooting	16 (51.6%)	<u>9</u>	<u>6</u>	1
<i>Personal troubles</i>				
Psychiatric				
Hallucinations, delusions, messianic	13 (41.9%)	<u>9</u>	4	0
Severe psych diagnosis pre-shooting	2 (6.5%)	<u>2</u>	0	0
Depression (self-report, diagnosed)	25 (80.6%)	<u>8</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>7*</u>
Taken or taking psychiatric medication	16 (51.6%)	<u>8</u>	5	3
Prior talk therapy	15 (48.4%)	5	5	5
Suicidality (attempts, ideation)	23 (74.2%)	<u>9</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>6*</u>
Family				
Family violence, alcohol/drugs	13 (41.9%)	2	<u>9</u>	2
Father or father figure problem	19 (61.3%)	5	<u>10</u>	4
Male family member lawbreaker	9 (29.0%)	0	<u>8</u>	1*
Mother problem	10 (32.3%)	2	<u>7</u>	1

**Table 2** continued

	Total (n = 31)	Psych (n = 10)	Family (n = 10)	Volatile (n = 11)
Parents divorced, never married	16 (51.6%)	3	<u>9</u>	4*
Guns from home or family member	24 (77.4%)	6	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u> *
Guns part of family culture, normative	10 (32.3%)	1	<u>7</u>	2*

Underlined %s and frequencies: over ½ of sample and over 60% of sub-groups

\* No data on Todd

## Illustrations of Gender-Related Commonalities

### *Emasculating Bullying and Marginalization by Male Peers*

Almost all the shooters had been victims of emasculating bullying and/or intentional marginalization that exposed their Adolescent Inside Masculinity deficits. Yet, of the shooters who reported being victims of bullying, over half were described by classmates as bullies themselves. For example, classmates described Michael Carneal as a troublemaker and a prankster who was both taunted by and taunted classmates [32]. Challenges to his masculinity appeared to be particularly traumatic for Michael. He seemed unable to get past relentless taunting by male classmates following the publication of an article in the school newspaper implying that Michael was gay. Michael said, “They ALL mocked and slaughtered my self-esteem.... After a crummy day ... when someone put into the school news paper that I was gay. I went home and cried yes I admit it I cried”.<sup>1</sup> A number of the shooters described their experiences of sexualized physical victimization by male peers, e.g., being tea-bagged (having another boy shove his genitals in their face), having another or other boys urinate on them, having their head pushed into the toilet). Several of 12-year-old Jose Reyes’ classmates reported episodes of Jose crying at school, but the suicide note that he left for his teachers and classmates reveals his considerable anger:

Dear teachers and students today is the day when I kill you bastards for the embarrassment that you did. You say mean things in school. That I’m gay, that I’m lazy. Stupid, idiot. And also that I pee my pants and also stealing my money. Well that all ends. Today I will get revenge on the students and teachers for ruining my life. Today I will bring a god damn pistol and rifle to shoot you and see how you like it when someone making fun of you.... I don’t care if I have a lots of bullets to shoot all of you, cause I’m going die trying on my last stand.... Have a great death at school.<sup>2</sup>

Describing his state of mind, Jamie Rouse said, “... I was so filled with, you know, hate and anger and this evil that, you know, I guess in a way I felt that, you know, they should be punished, too”. And, “I guess for so long I’d felt helpless and

<sup>1</sup> Paper on self-esteem, found on Carneal’s computer. Quoted in Newman et al. ([32], p. 27).

<sup>2</sup> Reyes, J. (n.d.). Jose Reyes’ letters. Retrieved from Langman [19].

weak, and with violence, you know, you have control”.<sup>3</sup> In a pre-shooting note, Evan Ramsey wrote: “... I do hope the shells hit more than one person, because I am angry at more than one person”. Then, “Now, I got something to say to all of those people who think I’m strange can suck my dick and like it”.<sup>4</sup>

Jeffrey Weise and Asa Coon were relentlessly teased and marginalized by male classmates. Their physical self-presentations deviated dramatically from the “cool” norm at their school. Jeffrey described his school attire in an Internet post, “I wear combat boots with my pant legs tucked into them, wear a trench coat...”.<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey continued with this point:

I happen to be ‘not so popular’. Gothic (in the sense that I wear nothing but black, spike my hair in ‘devil’ horns, and listen to music like Cradle of Filth and KoRn), and happen to be an emotionally disturbed person, if you could call me that.<sup>6</sup>

At his school, Asa commonly wore a long trench coat, a dog collar, black nail polish, and an empty gun holster strapped to his ankle. Post-shooting, classmates agreed that Asa had been a victim of taunts over his appearance.

### *Proving Heterosexuality and Repudiating Femininity*

For many of the shooters, heterosexual success was blocked by a girlfriend’s rejection or a potential girlfriend’s lack of interest in them. In such cases, the shooter typically responded with extreme expressions of (masculine) anger over the rejection, but self-hatred over the (feminine) responses of sadness and powerlessness that the rejection had provoked in them. Luke Woodham and Jaylen Fryberg provide examples. Luke was distraught following his girlfriend’s rejection of him. Indeed, he carried out the shooting one year to the day after the breakup, and she was his first (and a fatal) victim. The rampage itself, Luke came to believe, would be restorative: “Grant [his self-identified Satanist friend] knew I’d been hurt by Christina... and he said there was a way to get revenge on her”. [He said that] “Satan was the way ... Satan would give me anything ... money, power, sex, women, revenge”.<sup>7</sup> And, “[O]ne second I was some kind of broken-hearted idiot, and the next second I had power over many things”.<sup>8</sup> Shortly before his rampage, Jaylen Fryberg had been rejected by his girlfriend and was devastated by the breakup. In several tweets days before the rampage, he wrote, “I hate that I can’t

<sup>3</sup> Leung, R. (2004). The mind of a school shooter. *CBSN: CBS News*, April 12. Retrieved from <http://cbsnnews.com/news/the-mind-of-a-school-shooter/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ramsey v. State* (2002).

<sup>5</sup> Weise J. (2004). Internet post, edited by Weise, May 13. Retrieved from [www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Lieberman ([23], pp. 106–107).

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Fast, J. (2008). *Ceremonial violence: A psychological explanation of school shootings*. Woodstock & New York: The Overlook Press.

live without you.... “I know it seems like I’m sweating it off ... But I’m not...”<sup>9</sup> Then, “I set the date. Hopefully you regret not talking to me”. Then finally, “Bang bang I’m dead”.<sup>10</sup> Relatedly, Jon Romano had just broken up with his girlfriend, who reported that the night before the shooting he had emailed her a picture of himself holding a long gun.

T. J. Lane and T. J. Solomon directed their fury toward particular insider boys whom they believed had started dating their former girlfriend. Both of them shot the particular “offending” boy (in each case, along with five others). Classmates of T. J. Lane’s reported that the new alleged boyfriend had threatened to beat up T. J., and that T. J. had taken up weightlifting to prepare for such a fight. After his girlfriend broke up with him, T. J. had told friends that he was going to bring a gun or bomb to school, or kill himself. Similarly, T. J. Solomon believed that his ex-girlfriend was pursuing a boy who had bullied him. Asked to explain his rampage, Evan Ramsey replied that his “girlfriend [had] said ‘fuck you’ and disappeared. And everybody constantly coming at me and messing with me”.<sup>11</sup>

Mitchell Johnson, only 13 at the time of his rampage, was particularly anxious about his reputational success with girls. A friend testified that after one break-up, Mitchell began to cry, found a rope and a gun, and said he was going to kill himself. Mitchell was also “apprehensive about the impact of [a subsequent] breakup on his reputation” [32, p. 37]; concerned that the girl would tell others that she had rejected him, he attempted to discredit her in front of his male friends. Mitchell had been both a sexual victim and perpetrator outside of school: he had been sexually abused by two older neighbor boys, and he had been charged with molesting a two-year-old girl. Mitchell’s efforts to convince peers of his heterosexual maturity (including telling friends that he thought he might marry one or another of his girlfriends) fell short.

Three shooters referred to a specific girl for whom they secretly pined, but to no avail. Alvaro Castillo obsessed over a girl who had attended his high school: “I will send Anna an email telling her how much I love and care for her. I will tell her... that I named my shotgun or rifle after her...”. And, a week before the shooting, “I miss Anna”. “I don’t deserve her though. I don’t deserve anyone. If I was mentally well, maybe I could’ve told her my feelings”.<sup>12</sup> Kip Kinkel and Dylan Klebold wrote about girls they “loved” who could have helped them, but did not. From Kip’s journal:

There is one person that could help but she won’t. I think I love her, but she could never love me.... Today of all days, I asked her to help me. I was shot down. I feel like my heart has been ripped apart. I gave her all I have, and she just threw it away.... Every time I see your face, my heart is shot with an

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Johnson, M. A. (2014). Washington school shooter Jaylen Fryberg ‘happy’, ‘popular’. Retrieved from <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/marysville-school-shooting>.

<sup>10</sup> Jaylen Fryberg: Shocking tweets...

<sup>11</sup> Fainru, S. (1998). Killing in the classroom: a tragedy was preceded by many overlooked signals. *Boston Globe*, October 29. [www.boston.com/bostonglobe/](http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/). Quoted and cited in Langman ([20], p. 117).

<sup>12</sup> Castillo. (n.d.) *Life’s fantasies: The journal of Alvaro Castillo*. Retrieved from Langman [19].

arrow. I think she will say yes, but she doesn't does she? She says, 'I don't know'. The three most fucked up words in the English language<sup>13</sup>.

He followed this with, "Oh fuck. I sound so pitiful. People would laugh at this if they read it. I hate being laughed at. But they won't laugh after they're scraping parts of their parents, sisters, brothers, and friends from the wall of my hate". And, from Dylan's writings: "I just hope she likes me as much as I LOVE her.... The sound of her laugh, I picture her face, I love her".<sup>14</sup> Contemplating the murder-suicide plan, Dylan wrote to this girl, "The reason that I am writing you now is that ... I want to go on to a new existence.... However, if it was true that you loved me as I do you ... I would find a way to survive".<sup>15</sup> The letter was never sent. About girls generally, Dylan wrote, "I know I can never have them".<sup>16</sup> Eric Harris was angered by the denial of his right to have sex with girls. He listed "getting laid" as one of the things he wanted to do before the attack: "Right now I'm trying to get fucked ... why the fuck can't I get any [sex], I mean, I'm nice and considerate and all that shit, but nooooo".<sup>17</sup>

Rage and bitter resentment toward women emerged as a recurring theme. Eric Harris wrote profanely about the inferiority of girls and his desire to rape them. Relatedly, the mother of one of Andrew Wurst's friends said she was "shocked" when she "overheard him [Andrew] speaking in a harsh, disturbing voice, making a crude and angry comment about girls".<sup>18</sup> Andrew Golden, only 11 at the time of his rampage, was known for frightening and threatening girls in his neighborhood. And, although he appeared to have no romantic or sexual connections with any girls, Adam Lanza had written a piece on the inherent selfishness of women, which he labeled "Selfish". Several of the shooters also expressed homophobic feelings. In a particularly extreme example, Robert Gladden used Facebook to post vulgar death threats to a classmate who had just come out as transsexual.

### *Being Tough*

Shooters' attempts to ameliorate or reverse AIM-related failures commonly involved displays of toughness in front of their classmates. Mitchell Johnson was known generally for acts of bravado and swagger at school, including lying to his insider friends about having undertaken dangerous feats and having been a gang member. His ongoing attempts to impress his classmates as a "tough guy" were unsuccessful. Andy Williams quickly became a victim of vicious bullying by other

<sup>13</sup> Kip Kinkel's writings. Quoted in Langman [19], July 29, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Lieberman ([23], p. 96).

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>16</sup> Jefferson County Sheriff's Office (n.d.), 26,388. Quoted and cited in Langman ([20], 53).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 26,018. Quoted and cited in Langman ([20], p. 40).

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Dejong, W., Epstein, J. C., & Hart, T. E. 2002. Bad things happen in good communities: the rampage shooting in Edinboro, Pennsylvania. In National Research Council—Institute of Medicine (2003), p. 85.

boys at his new school. Depressed and struggling socially, he sought out an alternative group of friends who harassed him as well. According to his post-shooting therapist, Andy had begun to think about “taking a gun to school.... If he did that then people would know that he was really tough and strong, and that he could fight for himself and fend for himself and people would leave him alone” [40]. Andy further explained that he was “already really depressed about everything and then like everybody’s [his alternative group of male friends] egging me on.... and... I felt like I didn’t have anything to lose”.<sup>19</sup>

Many of the shooters used guns and other weapons to convince both themselves and their peers that they were tough and powerful. Asked post-shooting about how it felt to build an arsenal of guns, Michael Carneal said, “I was feeling proud, strong, good, and more respected. I had accomplished something. I’m not the kind of kid who accomplishes anything”.<sup>20</sup> Asked why he shot his classmates, Michael said:

I guess it was because they ignored me. I had guns, I brought them to school. I showed them to [friends], and they were still ignoring me. I didn’t expect to kill anyone. I was just going to shoot. I thought maybe they would be scared of me and then no one would mess with Michael.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding the purchasing of his first guns, Eric Harris wrote: “I feel more confident, stronger, more God-like”.<sup>22</sup> Kip Kinkel had bragged to his classmates about becoming the next Unabomber, and in a class report, he had instructed his classmates on how to make a bomb. Together, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold created and publicized videos of their bomb-making exploits. Virtually all the shooters had told others of their rampage plans or desires. In many cases, these communications were expressed as threats.

For example, Asa Coon was suspended for assaulting a boy who had insulted him. Classmates reported that both before and after his suspension, Asa issued myriad threats about taking the school down. Similarly, Robert Gladden posted on Facebook that “something bad” was going to take place at his high school at the end of the school year. Many of the shooters’ threats (including Robert’s) contained references to Columbine. A student who ate lunch with him everyday reported that T. J. Solomon had said that “the kids at Columbine were aiming at certain people, and that slowed them down. He said that if he ever shot up Heritage High, he would shoot everybody and not aim. He said he would even shoot me, but I didn’t pay any

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<sup>19</sup> Sawyer [40].

<sup>20</sup> Benedek, E., Weitzel, W., & Clark, C. (1998). Report of psychiatric and psychological evaluation: Michael Alan Carneal, July 29, provided to the McCracken County Commonwealth Attorney in reference to Indictment No. 97-CR00350, dated Dec 17,1997, 4. Quoted and cited in Newman et al. ([33], p. 6).

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Newman et al. ([33], p. 33).

<sup>22</sup> Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office (n.d.), 26,017. Quoted and cited in Langman ([20], p. 28).

attention to him”.<sup>23</sup> This student also testified that T. J. had brought bomb-making instructions to school after the Columbine shooting.

### Sub-groupings

The frequencies and percentages shown in Table 1 describe the patterns associated with each personal problems grouping. The PSYCH shooters shot (and killed) far more people than the FAMILY shooters, who shot (and killed) more people than the VOLATILE shooters. No differences were identified among the groupings regarding either the location (rural, suburban, urban) of the shooting or the frequency of post-rampage suicide. The personal troubles and AIM-related traits of each grouping are described below.

#### *Psychiatric Disorder (n = 10)*

All the shooters in the PSYCH grouping exhibited symptoms consistent with psychosis or psychopathy. Eight had experienced hallucinations or delusions, often conveying mirror images of their superiority and worthlessness. Three (Pierson, Harris, Golden) displayed symptoms consistent with psychopathy. Adam Lanza’s diagnoses varied but were descriptively similar, e.g., “significant social impairments and extreme anxiety ... lacks empathy and has very rigid thought processes”; or, “emotionally paralyzed”, with autism and obsessive–compulsive disorder [4]. Other than Adam and Alvaro Castillo (diagnosed simply as psychotic), none of the PSYCH shooters had been diagnosed pre-shooting with any of the above disorders. [It should be noted that as stated in its Diagnostic Statistic Manual (DSM), the American Psychiatric Association contends that children (under 18) are too young to be diagnosed with some of the mental illnesses considered to be more enduring, even permanent, e.g., personality disorders, schizophrenia]. However, at the surviving shooters’ hearings or trials, experts for the defense often argued that their client suffered from some form of schizophrenia. Moreover, as shown in Table 2, eight of the ten had referred to themselves prior to their rampage as suffering from mental illness. Indeed, in one journal item, Karl Pierson referred to himself as a “psychopath with a superiority complex”.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Distinguishing Adolescent Insider Masculinity Features: The PSYCH Grouping*

The most prominent differentiating feature of the PSYCH shooters was their excessive display of behaviors and attitudes linked to school shootings in general in prior research. That is, these shooters displayed far more of these traits and

<sup>23</sup> Pilcher, J. (1999). Heritage suspect wrote about Trench Coat Mafia. Associated Press, August 10. Retrieved from <http://onlineathens.com/stories/081099>.

<sup>24</sup> Colorado High School shooter kept ‘diary of a madman’ about bullying (2014). *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/11/colorado-shooter-shooter-diary-bullying-arapahoe-high-karl-pierson-bullying-arapahoe-high-karl-pierson>, p. 1.

expressed them more frequently and intensely than did the shooters in the FAMILY and VOLATILE groupings.

Particularly notable were their expressions of homicidal and hate-filled rage. As he recalled it, Kip Kinkel's auditory hallucinations began at age twelve, and the first words he heard were: "You need to kill everyone, everyone in the world". The voices also let Kip know how they felt about him, as in "You are a stupid piece of shit. You aren't worth anything".<sup>25</sup> Their messages paralleled his own feelings of rage and despair; he wrote in his journal: "I hate every person on this earth. I wish I was dead". And, "Why aren't I normal. Help me. No one will. I will kill every last mother fucking one of you".<sup>26</sup> Eric Harris was one of the most violence-prone of the shooters; his journal writings graphically describe his desire to torture, kill and destroy. For example: "God, I want to torch and level everything in this whole fucking area...imagine THAT, you fuckers".<sup>27</sup> Or, "I say 'KILL MANKIND' no one should survive...".<sup>28</sup> And, "I want to tear a throat out with my own teeth like a pop can. I want to gut someone with my hand, to tear a head off ...".<sup>29</sup> In one of several similar self-videoed rants, Eric expounds on his powerful superiority, "My belief is if I say something, it goes. I am the law",<sup>30</sup> and "No one is worthy of this planet, only me and who ever I choose".<sup>31</sup> Working at taking on Eric's mindset, his co-shooter Dylan Klebold's self-glorification grew bolder. Two years before the shooting, Dylan had written, "... me is a god, a god of sadness".<sup>32</sup> A year later, he wrote simply that "... I am God".<sup>33</sup> Dylan also expressed his misery over denied entitlement, as in "... such a sad desolate lonely unsalvageable I feel I am ... not fair, NOT FAIR!!!"<sup>34</sup> Karl Pierson was another enraged, messianic shooter. Fantasizing the rampage, he wrote that he planned to go to his school and

waltz in shooting everyone in my way. From there, there are classrooms in the ... where I will do something that 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.... I would love to burn -so much destruction.<sup>35</sup>

There were other signs of excessiveness among the PSYCH shooters. As shown in Table 2, all but one brought multiple weapons to the shooting, and six had accumulated arsenals at or near their homes. Nine expressed an unusual fascination

<sup>25</sup> [www.pbs.org/whbh/pages/frontline/shows/kinkel/trial/bolstad.html](http://www.pbs.org/whbh/pages/frontline/shows/kinkel/trial/bolstad.html). Quoted and cited in Langman ([20], p 88).

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Lieberman ([23], p. 27).

<sup>27</sup> Jefferson County Sheriff's Office (n.d.). *Columbine documents*, 26,013. Quoted and cited in Langman ([20], p. 30).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 26,010. Quoted and cited in *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 26,016. Quoted and cited in *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 10,415. Quoted and cited in *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 26,006. Quoted and cited in *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 26,397. Quoted and cited in *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 26,405. Quoted and cited in *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 26,396. Quoted and cited in *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>35</sup> McKauley, L. (n.d.). Investigative report. Arapahoe High School, Case # CT13-44545, p. 29.

with weapons, especially guns. Several felt that their personified guns infused them with power. In his journal, Kip Kinkel wrote, “I need to find more weapons. My parents are trying to take away some of my guns! My guns are the only things that haven’t stabbed me in the back”.<sup>36</sup> They were also more likely than the shooters in the other two groupings to refer to prior mass shootings and anti-heroes and to be obsessed with themes of violence. Moreover, nine of the ten had had problems with a girlfriend or with girls in general. On the other hand, all but two lived in stable families, and almost all were viewed as above average in intellect.

### *Family Turbulence (n = 10)*

Most of the FAMILY shooters had lived in profoundly dysfunctional households, plagued by family violence, one or more parents or stepparents with an alcohol or drug problem, and a male family member with a criminal history. The examples below illustrate the severity and multiplicity of these boys’ family troubles.

Following his parents’ divorce when he was a young child, Evan Ramsey lived with his alcoholic mother, his two brothers, and a serial string of his mother’s abusive boyfriends. When Evan was five, his father was sentenced to prison for an armed assault on a newspaper office. His mother lost custody of her sons when Evan was seven, and over the next three years, Evan and his younger brother lived in ten different foster homes. In some of these homes, Evan was both physically and sexually abused. Then, a week before Evan’s rampage, his older brother was arrested and charged with a pornography shop robbery; a week earlier his father had been paroled from prison [38]. According to Langman [20], Evan believed he was living under a “family curse”. Jeffrey Weise’s young, never-married parents ended their relationship prior to his birth. Jeffrey had lived with extended family members on the Red Lake reservation in Minnesota for his first few years, after which time his mother took him to her home in Minneapolis. There, she and his new stepfather, both alcoholics, regularly abused him:

My mom used to abuse me a lot when I was little. She would hit me with anything she could get her hands on, she used to drink excessively, too. She would tell me I was a mistake, and she would say so many things that it’s hard to deal with them or think of them without crying.<sup>37</sup>

When he was nine, Jeffrey’s biological father committed suicide at the end of a standoff with the police. In a car accident two years later, his mother suffered a traumatic brain injury, and her sister was killed—both had been drinking. Jeffrey was then taken back to the reservation, where he lived intermittently with various family members. Jamie Rouse’s father was an alcoholic and drug addict who physically abused his wife and beat his children with belts; recalling one such beating, Jamie said:

<sup>36</sup> Kip Kinkel’s writings (n.d.). Quoted in Langman ([19], p. 2014).

<sup>37</sup> [www.jeffweise.com/who/html](http://www.jeffweise.com/who/html) (n.d.) Quoted and cited in Langman ([20], p. 119).

My daddy came in there, and he raised me by the arm, and [he started whipping] the back of my legs, and my butt too, and he just kept doing it. I had bruises and welts, even a few days afterward. I just lay there and cried on the floor.<sup>38</sup>

### *Distinguishing Adolescent Insider Masculinity Features: The FAMILY Grouping*

Although these boys had devastating family problems, they were also affected by Adolescent Insider Masculinity problems. As shown in Table 2, all denounced male classmates for calling them out with homo-epithets and other emasculating labels. Indeed, five of the eight boys who shot a targeted victim whom they claimed had harassed them were in the FAMILY grouping. Masculinity problems also appeared to characterize their home lives; for example, all reported significant conflicts with their father or father figure. Additionally, they were more likely than the PSYCH or VOLATILE shooters to have long-term academic problems, and they all suffered from depression.

Classmates typically reported having mixed feelings toward these boys, often describing them as withdrawn or hostile. For instance, one student said that T. J. Lane was regularly teased at school, which resulted in him “put[ting] a wall around himself”.<sup>39</sup> Yet, another student described T. J. as a quiet person who could be nice to others if he felt comfortable with them. Similarly, Jeffrey Weise and Robert Gladden were each described by classmates as troubled and withdrawn. One student noted that Robert dressed “kind of gothic” and grew his hair out. Another said of Robert, “He’d like wear it [his hair] in front of his face, like he was hiding”.<sup>40</sup> And, in a more extreme example, classmates reported that Jason Hoffman was routinely surly and that students generally tried to avoid him. One classmate said of Jason, “He had this hate-the-world walk...”.<sup>41</sup> And, from another classmate, “He was one of those guys that wouldn’t talk to anyone, even if you tried to talk to him...”.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, especially in light of their highly abusive home lives, Evan Ramsey could have been speaking for many of these shooters when, asked why he had chosen to attack his school, he answered: “That’s where most of my pain and suffering was”.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Meyer, R. (2000). When the shooting stops. *Los Angeles Times*, April 22. Quoted and cited in Langman, P. (2012). School shooters: Nine brief sketches. In Langman [19], [www.schoolshooters.info](http://www.schoolshooters.info).

<sup>39</sup> Pearson, M. (2012). One dead, four hurt in Ohio high school shooting. CNN, February 28. Cited in [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com).

<sup>40</sup> Dominguez, A. and Nuckols, B. (2012). Robert Wayne Gladden Jr., Perry Hall High shooting suspect, had troubled past. *Huffington Post*, August 29. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/30/robert-wayne-gladden-jr-perry-hall-high-shooting-suspect-troubled-past\\_n\\_1842343.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=crime](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/30/robert-wayne-gladden-jr-perry-hall-high-shooting-suspect-troubled-past_n_1842343.html?utm_hp_ref=crime).

<sup>41</sup> Accused teen a loner. (2001). *Amarillo Globe.com*, March 23. Retrieved from [http://amarillo.com/stories/2001/02/23/usn\\_accused.shtml#.Vmd7ktC4m3c](http://amarillo.com/stories/2001/02/23/usn_accused.shtml#.Vmd7ktC4m3c).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Dedman, B. (2000). Shooters usually tell friends what they are planning. *Chicago Sun-Times – Deadly lessons: School shooters tell why*, October 15–16. Retrieved from [http://amarillo.com/stories/2001/03/23/usn\\_accused.shtml#.Vmd7ktC4m3c](http://amarillo.com/stories/2001/03/23/usn_accused.shtml#.Vmd7ktC4m3c).

*Situational Volatility (n = 11)*

Post-shooting investigations revealed long-standing problems with under-the-surface anger among the VOLATILE shooters. Their anger was displayed sporadically at school, especially in the form of outbursts that were often out of proportion to the offense. Bryan Oliver had complained to school adults about being teased, but he was also known to become easily enraged over one or another “injustice”, a number of which were *not* linked to bullying (e.g., finding himself locked out of his classroom, Bryan had pounded on the door, yelled at the teacher, and then slammed locker doors up and down the hall). A school report from as far back as fourth grade had described Bryan as a socially inept boy who exhibited an explosive temper. Several classmates in their respective schools noted that Jaylen Fryberg and Seth Trickey were prone to occasional angry outbursts, especially when criticized or challenged. Some months before his rampage, Jaylen had tweeted to a male friend:

Fuck it! Might as well Die now.... You can't make a bond with anyone like the bond me and you have right now.... Tell me what your going to do.... You're gonna piss me off... then some shits gonna go down and I don't think you'll like it.... Your not gonna like what happens next.<sup>44</sup>

Although Jose Reyes was bullied, several of his classmates reported that he often was the one to start arguments. According to one friend, Jose was ‘nice’, but “[A]nything you’re talking about, [if] he doesn’t agree with it, he would start arguing with that person about what the person said. I [saw] him doing it a lot at school”.<sup>45</sup>

Most of the VOLATILE shooters blamed classmates and teachers for challenging or discrediting them; three specifically blamed their school in general for treating them unjustly or failing to help them. Jon Romano had a long history of clinical depression. But, he also carried tremendous anger toward the “others” he blamed for discrediting him. In a note, he explained why he had decided to shoot up his school:

But why Columbia (other than I hate it for obvious reasons)? About eleven months ago I was in Four Winds [a psychiatric facility]. I told a couple people ... because they wouldn't care. But I guess everyone knew. And one day, Four Winds received a fax about people from Columbia saying that I said I am going to kill myself and no one can stop me. I figure that's why I was there longer than should have. So Columbia. IT'S YOUR FAULT.<sup>46</sup>

However, at another point, he directed his wrath toward the psychiatric facility itself: “Oh YEA, blame Four Winds. Those bastards were horrible”. And then in yet

<sup>44</sup> Jaylen Fryberg: Shocking tweets predicted horrific Marysville shooting (2014). Retrieved from <http://hollywoodlife.com/2014/10/24/jaylen-fryberg-marysville-shooter-tweets-high-school-shooting>.

<sup>45</sup> Elam, S., Hanna, J., & Vercammen, P. (2003). ‘Please don’t shoot’: Wounded survivor, 12, recalls Nevada school attack. *CNN.com*, October 25. Retrieved from [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com).

<sup>46</sup> Patrick, W. B. (n.d.). *An incident of school violence in East Greenbush, New York*, 193. Retrieved from [http://www.williampatrickwriter.com/docs/Commercial\\_SchoolViolence.pdf](http://www.williampatrickwriter.com/docs/Commercial_SchoolViolence.pdf).

another call-out, he wrote: “Who should you blame? SOCIETY”.<sup>47</sup> In a rambling note, Jon gave loving thanks and goodbyes to family members and friends, but followed that with a list of: “People [teachers] I Hate: Mrs. xxxx.... Bitch. Mr. xxxx– Liar FUCK YOU. Jeff xxxx – Talk shit behind my back. Fuck you.... There’s other friends and people I hate....”.<sup>48</sup> After his rampage, Jon told investigators that he had “had fantasies for about the last year of going into Columbia and shooting up the place. The fantasies were of me shooting random people”.<sup>49</sup>

Independent of the limited data on several of them (Todd, Bradley, Newman, Campbell), the rampages of the VOLATILE shooters are simply more difficult to understand than those of the PSYCH or FAMILY shooters. While a number of the VOLATILE shooters were depressed (Romano and Bradley seriously so), none appeared to have anywhere near the level of psychiatric problems found among the PSYCH shooters. Similarly, unlike the FAMILY shooters, most of the VOLATILE shooters had stable families and acceptable academic standings. Additionally (see Table 2), they displayed far fewer of the school shooting-linked behaviors than the PSYCH or FAMILY shooters.

Classmates expressed either mixed or positive feelings toward the VOLATILE shooters. Seth Trickey and Jaylen Fryberg were popular at school, insiders in many of their classmates’ minds. One classmate described Seth as “just a normal kid ... smart, always on the honor roll, very polite. I’ve known him since preschool”.<sup>50</sup> Another classmate referred to Seth as “kind of cool, never acting weird or being a threat to anyone. He is a nice guy”.<sup>51</sup> Upon learning about Jaylen’s rampage, classmates expressed shock. One classmate said: “People were telling me who it was ... and I was like, ‘What? This is not happening.... This is crazy.’ It was just surprising to me that him, out of all people, would be the one”.<sup>52</sup> Following his suicide at the rampage site, one of Douglas Bradley’s friends wrote to his family: “I can’t think of a single person that knew him and didn’t love him...”.<sup>53</sup> Douglas’s father characterized his son as a boy who was “never comfortable with himself “and had trouble with “restraints” but was also “caring and bright and artistic”.<sup>54</sup> According to several classmates, Jose Reyes did have some school friends, but most were girls. Family friends described Jose and his siblings as polite and well-

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>50</sup> Jackson, D. Z. (1999). Shy, sweet and deadly. *Chicago Tribune*, December 14. Retrieved from [www.articles.chicagotribune.com/1999-12-14/new/9912140076/](http://www.articles.chicagotribune.com/1999-12-14/new/9912140076/).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Conlon, K. & Brumfield, B. (2014). Washington school shooting claims another victim. *CNN.com*, October 27, Retrieved from [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com).

<sup>53</sup> Green, L. (1996). Son’s suicide leaves father with pain, plea. *San Jose Mercury News*, February 26. Retrieved from <http://nl.newsbank.com>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

behaved; one neighbor expressed her disbelief with “No, not this boy, this family”.<sup>55</sup>

### *Distinguishing Adolescent Insider Masculinity Problems: The VOLATILE Grouping*

Although all the VOLATILE shooters referred to some problem with Adolescent Insider Masculinity, they reported fewer such problems than did the PSYCH or FAMILY shooters. As indicated in Table 2, approximately half of the VOLATILE shooters were subjected to emasculating bullying by their male classmates. Many also felt isolated or marginalized. However, only two reported a problem with a girlfriend or with girls in general. The majority confronted their failings with AIM-related correctives, such as displays of bravado and entitlement.

## Discussion

The findings from this research support the argument that failings in the enactment of Adolescent Insider Masculinity norms play a strong role in adolescent rampage school shootings. The shooters’ gender performances at school were typically “off”, either not meeting or exaggerating the AIM imperatives. All 31 shooters were made aware of such failings by their classmates’ treatment of them, e.g., emasculating bullying, rejection by girlfriends, and marginalization in general. However, they also cast these indicators as undeserved injustices that resulted in the denial of their entitlements. As Dylan Klebold put it, “NOT FAIR”.

The boys countered the humiliations with performances consistent with AIM norms that emphasize being tough (better to be mad than sad, give ‘em hell). But, they overplayed these themes with behaviors that violated the moral (“sophisticated”) boundaries of masculinity and thus further damaged their typically low social status. A number of the shooters mistakenly thought they could salvage or improve their AIM status by going even further—threatening to carry out a mass shooting or other destructive attack on their school. Over time, as their anger over the AIM-related “injustices” grew, they planned and then carried out the rampage shooting at the school and in front of the school-affiliated collective that they held responsible for their low social standing. Although many had made hit lists that they shared with classmates, the great majority shot randomly at whomever they encountered, and those who appeared to have shot or shot at an intended victim went on to randomly shoot or shoot at others. Imagining a hyper-violent, sacrificial ending to their rampage, most carried out, attempted, or fantasized their own suicide at the rampage site.

All of the shooters also had at least one of three long-standing personal troubles: psychiatric disorder, family dysfunction, or situational volatility. Importantly, then,

<sup>55</sup> McAndrew, S. (2013). Friends, family say middle school shooter was gentle boy. *Reno Gazette-Journal*, November 11. Retrieved from <http://www.usatoday.com/stosry/news/natiohn/2013/11/11/nevada-school-shooter/3493023>.

the positive relationship found in the current study between Adolescent Insider Masculinity failings and rampage school shootings is modified by the shooters' personal troubles. While these findings strongly suggest that such troubles compound the shooters' AIM problems, they do not provide any certainty about causal sequences.

Finally, while the 31 boys shared many of the AIM failings and responded to them in similar ways, they also showed some patterned differences. Particularly notable was the finding of sub-grouping differences in the level and intensity of AIM-related behaviors and attitudes. Additionally, the finding of differentiation by sub-grouping provided one way of accounting for variations in prior findings regarding mental illness and family dysfunction.

## Interventions

Findings from this study suggest a number of interventions for preventing future adolescent rampage school shootings. Because the Adolescent Insider Masculinity problems and reactions to them are school-situated, it is there that actions should initially be concentrated. Undertakings should include the elaboration of a process for identifying boys displaying behaviors and attitudes common to rampage school shooters, along with the provision of in-school or referral services for them. Matching the intervention to the individual case is important. As the data from this study show, many of the adolescent shooters had personal troubles that affected their ability to manage their social performances at school. Moreover, the potential rampage of a boy with severe mental illness and rampage-related risk factors could be especially injurious.

Schools also have a critical role to play in addressing adolescent masculinity issues in their curriculum. Given that successful gender performances are extremely salient for adolescent boys in general, discussion-based forums focused on issues of gender should be regularized. Students could benefit from both mixed-sex and same-sex discussions. How often are adolescent boys given the opportunity to talk with one another about masculinity norms and their challenges, including norms embracing violence or the effects of emasculating bullying? Such classroom-based discussions could also help schools identify, provide and give value to activities that appeal to boys whose interests and skills lie outside the norms of insider masculinity.

Schools should also provide opportunities for students to learn about school shootings. Because shooters almost always tell peers about their rampage desires and plans, students should be apprised of the importance of reporting troubling behaviors to some adult. Likewise, adults with evidence-backed concerns about a particular boy must also be encouraged to come forth. At the same time, steps to protect a boy from further stigma by identifying him as at-risk for a shooting should be in place. Many boys display a number of the at-risk behaviors and attitudes and could benefit from the above offerings, but very few of them will actually become school shooters.

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### Compliance with ethical standards

**Conflict of interest** Author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

**Human and animal rights** This study does not contain any studies with humans or animals performed by the author. All data on school shooters came from pre-published sources, e.g., academic articles and books, media reports; multiple sources were examined for data verification.

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