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## Comprehending Columbine

Larkin, Ralph W.

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## THE OTHER COLUMBINE

**I**N CHAPTER 2, I presented a view of Columbine High School as most people see it. The school has many virtues that are quite admirable: a strong academic program; a successful sports program; high student involvement in extracurricular activities; large, beautiful, and well equipped facilities; a highly qualified teaching faculty; and even a student body known for good sportsmanship and good manners. Yet on several occasions in my investigation, I heard former Columbine students say, “They [Harris and Klebold] killed the wrong students.” The following came from an interview with a former Columbine student:

After Columbine happened—this is one of the things that a lot of people don’t really mention—no one at the school, and I mean no one, asked the question “why?” Not a single person who was in the school that day asked. ... [Yet] everyone said the same thing, “*They got the wrong people.*” *Everyone said that—cheerleaders, ballplayers, wrestlers, they all said the same thing* [Emphasis added] (Recorded May 13, 2003).

When probed about this comment, students said that Harris and Klebold did not point their guns at those students who harassed and intimidated their peers. As a matter of fact, students pointed out that their victims were nerdy

kids or students who were kind to others, well-liked students such as Rachel Scott and Isaiah Sholes.

In a group interview with several former female Columbine students, the following transpired:

FS1: One of the things, too, that always sticks out to me is that if you ask anyone, almost anyone, at Columbine, about the shooting, one thing you get a lot is “They killed all the wrong people.” It’s just that comment in general, that they killed all the wrong people, that’s really saying something about our school.

FS2: They’re supposedly attacking all the popular people, but the people they killed were like, they were friendly to everybody, they weren’t in major cliques, and I remember Richard Castaldo got shot and he’s in a wheelchair, he’s a paraplegic now. I remember going, “Why did they shoot him?” He used to hang out with them sometimes. I hung out with him. He was so ... out of everybody, he was the least conformist, he hung out with nobody, he didn’t care what people thought about him. He tried to be kind to everyone. ... Out of everyone that I knew really really well, that was majorly effected by the shooting, that got shot or that died, he was a total loner. And Isaiah, why Isaiah [Sholes]? He was the only African American that got shot. And you know, there’s lots of talk that’s why he got shot, and he was nice to everyone he met. He was so nice [Crying] (Recorded May 13, 2003).

These comments revealed an underlying current of resentment against those who were the bullies and who harassed their fellow students. It also speaks to a tacit assumption that the main cause of the shootings was intimidation and harassment by students known to all. It also speaks to feelings of outrage and a sense of continuing injustice. In this chapter, the internal climate of Columbine High School will be explored.

In the previous chapter, the structure of peer group relationships was delineated. As was noted, the peer structure was highly polarized. Because this was a structural phenomenon, it was taken for granted. No interviewee stated that the peer group structure was polarized between the jocks and the outcasts. However, students did understand that anyone having the outcasts as friends was not going to have friends in the in-crowd and that having outcast friends meant sharing their stigma and being subjected to the same predatory victimization they experienced. It took a certain amount of bravery to befriend an outcast at Columbine.

This extreme polarization at Columbine between the jocks and the outcasts was quite different than contradictions reported elsewhere in the literature on high school cliques (Eckert 1989; Larkin 1979) in which the in-between students could have friends with both jocks and outcasts, and in Eckert's terms, function as "brokers" between the upper and lower ends of the student hierarchy.

In this chapter, the internal climate of Columbine High School is explored. As noted above, students' and community members' views of the internal climate of Columbine high school were strongly influenced by their positions. To illustrate the contradictory views, which, not surprisingly, reflect the polarization of the student environment, Brooks Brown (Brown and Merritt 2002) comments:

By the end of my junior year, school shootings were making their way into the news. ... When we talked in class about the shootings, kids would make jokes about "it was going to happen at Columbine next." They would say that Columbine was absolutely primed for because of the bullying and the hate that was so prevalent at our school (97–98).

However, in an interview with one of Brown's senior classmates who was near the top of the student peer hierarchy, the following transpired:

I was on the Youth Advisory Council at Jefferson County my junior and senior year. What the Youth Advisory Council would do is we'd meet every month and they'd get together with students from each of the different schools in Jefferson County and they'd get together and talk about the problems that were going on, you know, if there were any, and highlight some of the positive things. And we just got to talk about making sure that everyone was having a positive experience within our high schools. And the April meeting of 1999 was a little strange. ... April's discussion happened to be about school shootings, because of all the stuff that had happened in Springfield and Jonesboro and Paducah and all that kind of stuff, and they were asking us, seriously, if we thought what we would do or what we should do in case that happened. I was sitting in the back of the room laughing hysterically. These people were talking about sniper drills and all this other kind of stuff, and school shooting and exiting, and blah, blah, blah, and I thought it was hysterical. And I said, "Are you kidding me? We live in the middle of white suburbia, and if you really, really think that thing is going to happen at Columbine High School, you're crazy!" And fifteen days later, POP! It happened, and it's just kind of a weird, coincidental thing that happened to me.

Wow! Looking back at myself in April 1999, sitting in back of that temporary building and laughing, whew! I was wrong. Just proof that it can happen anywhere (Recorded May 1, 2003).

In this chapter, several issues will be enumerated. First, to what extent did intimidation, bullying, and predatory relationships exist at Columbine High School? Second, how did students perceive the internal climate of Columbine High School, and how did they respond to it? Third, how did administration, faculty, and staff respond to conflicts among students?

## BULLYING

Within days of the shootings, newspaper articles were reporting complaints by Columbine students about harassment and bullying in the school (Adams and Russakoff 1999; Greene 1999; Holtz 1999; Kurtz 1999). In response to allegations that not only did predatory relationships exist within Columbine High School, but that they were abetted by faculty members and ignored by the administration, the governor of Colorado established a commission to investigate bullying on a statewide basis (Sanko 2000). In addition, a researcher was dispatched to Columbine High School to study the internal climate, resulting in a nine page report (Huerter 2000). The report is scathing in its characterization of the internal climate of Columbine High School. Its observations are in accord with the data I have collected and with the journalistic representations. In at least two cases, data I collected independently matched the data collected by Huerter.

First, prior to April 20, 1999, students were routinely harassed by the group I named in the previous chapter as “The Predators.” Second, only a small number of incidents were reported to faculty and administration. Third, the harassers, because of their status as leading athletes, received preferential treatment relative to the rest of the student population. Fourth, the tolerance of harassment by The Predators led others, including Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, to harass students who were more vulnerable, younger, and weaker than themselves.

The Predators were led by members of the football and wrestling teams. One member was the state champion wrestler who had been expelled from his previous high school for fighting, enrolled in Columbine in 1997, and became Columbine’s heavyweight wrestler and a member of the football team. His presence in the school intensified fears of being bullied by many students who tried to keep their distance from him. Another, a year younger than the wrestling champion, was the captain of the football team and played fullback, running for

over 1000 yards in his senior season. Because of his physical and verbal harassment, his girlfriend was granted a restraining order against him (Kurtz 1999). One student suggested that students, including he himself, armed themselves in order to protect themselves from The Predators:

SK: Kids bring pistols to school, knives, you name it. There were kids—not all of them, small groups—five or six who carried guns to school. They would carry pistols with them at all times. Knives were beyond common. I had a butterfly knife. Everyone did. Everyone carried knives with them.

RL: Why did they do that?

SK: Just in case. RH came after a friend of mine with a bat ... he's never gonna get me (Recorded April 30, 2004).

This same student, who described himself as an outcast, described two separate beatings he received at the hands of RH, plus a third that he witnessed when he was a freshman. In an interview with SK and CL, a female student who was a member of the leading crowd in 1999, the following transpired:

SK: My friend D and I [went] to a drinking party, two houses up from [RH]. We were stupid freshman, didn't know that it was a jocks-only party, and someone [was] beating his girlfriend in the bathroom and she comes out and she's bloody. ... D makes a stupid comment because we're all about women's rights and liberation. I had to baby D [after RH beat him up] the rest of the night with a broken nose, and he was bleeding out of his ear. ... Did you see any beatings that bad?

CL: Yes.

SK: They [beatings] happened a lot more often than you saw (Recorded April 30, 2004).

As IG noted, one of the favorite activities of The Predators was to question the sexual orientation of other males. They were constantly calling other males “fags,” “queers,” and “homos.” This is fairly standard and stereotypical behavior among jocks and has been documented by previous researchers (Garbarino and deLara 2002; Newman 2004). In an interview with six students, three who were on the football team, the male students stated that they called people “fags,” “homos,” and “queers.” However, they defended themselves by stating that they only did it among friends and that it was all in fun. Dominant males attempt to

humiliate their subordinates by questioning their masculinity. This practice has been a significant motivation for retaliatory violence in schools and has played a prominent role in several other rampage shootings, including Barry Loukaitis in Moses Lake, Washington, Michael Carneal in West Paducah Kentucky, and Charles Andrew Williams in Santee, California (Newman 2004). In the previous chapter, a student told how, when talking to a girl who dated football players, he was confronted by a member of the football team who threatened him with physical violence, called him a “fag,” and told him that he should learn to “suck cock.” After that, he kept his distance from her.

In January 1998, Harris and Klebold were surrounded by a large group of football players in the cafeteria and squirted with ketchup. According to interviews, RH suggested that because Harris and Klebold were always together they were a homosexual couple. Prendergast (2000) quoted Randy Brown, the father of Brooks Brown, as saying:

People surrounded them [Harris and Klebold] in the commons and squirted ketchup packets all over them, laughing at them, calling them faggots. That happened while teachers watched. They couldn't fight back. They wore the ketchup all day and went home covered with it.

A food fight nearly erupted in the cafeteria between The Predators and the outcast students, described as follows (Adams and Russakoff 1999):

Hoffschneider's circle—known as “the steroid poster boys”—had their cafeteria table. On the other side of the room, shy skinny boys—among them Harris and Klebold—claimed a table, too. The athletes threw Skittles candy at them, said senior John Savage. Once, athletes threw a bagel close to the table, and the cafeteria emptied for fear of a fight. In the boys' bathrooms, a graffiti war broke out—“Jocks rule!” Came the rejoinder: “Jocks suck!”

The Predators set the tone for the internal context of Columbine High School. Adams and Russakoff (1999) noted:

In line at registration for new classes that year, football players pushed a 4-foot-9 freshman and called her dirty because she dressed like a hippie. On another occasion a boy called “Little Joey Stair,” one of the wraith-like Trenchcoaters who was friends with Harris and Klebold, looked up in a hallway to see three football players shoving him into a locker,

saying, “Fag, what are you looking at?” remembered classmate Mikala Scrodin.

Last year there was a group of seniors who picked on everyone, not just the lowest people. Pretty much everyone was scared to take them on; if anyone said anything, they’d come after you, too. I don’t think teachers realized it was serious, they just saw it as kids joking around,” said Kevin Hofstra, a Yale-bound soccer team captain.

In the halls, body slams were common. Trenchcoat students got pushed more than most. “A football player reached out and stepped on the cord of one of these girls’ Walkman and it ripped out and fell and broke,” remembered Melissa Snow, who graduated in 1998. “She just didn’t say anything. For those kinds of kids it’s really hard to stand up to a bunch of football players, who are all standing around thinking it’s really funny what this guy did to you.

Harris and Klebold absorbed it all. As the year went by, they drifted closer to the Trenchcoaters, but unlike most students, they seemed to take the taunting to heart. “They just let the jocks get to them,” Colby said. “I think they were taunted to their limits.”

Discussing his drugs of choice, Eric Harris, on his Trenchcoat Mafia web site, stated the following: “My recent OTC [over-the-counter] of choice is cough syrup. I recommend it highly. It’s the best thing after a hard day of being called ‘gay’ by a schoolyard full of fashionable jocks and cheerleaders.”

A member of the leading crowd related the following to the author:

RL: I want to ask you one more question. When the football guys walked down the hall, did you witness them walking down the hall together and harass people as they walked down the hall? What did they do?

CL: They walked in a line to cover up the hallway and pushed anybody else out of their way.

DL: And what was their reaction when they would confront people?

CL: What do you mean like reaction?

RL: If you didn’t move?

CL: I’d feel sorry for you. You know what they did a lot was, as the kids were walking in the hallway, they’d grab their backpack and pull them to the floor, like real quick, if you pull someone’s backpack, it’s heavy enough, but if you pull them hard enough, they fall right to the floor. They did that a lot. They would walk down and just like, down the hallways and they filled up the whole hallway and just



anybody who was in their way, you'd scoot out of the way and if you don't you're in trouble (Recorded April 30, 2004).

According to Brooks Brown, harassment was widespread. Below is an extensive description of his experience (Brown and Merritt 2002):

Sometimes kids would just ignore us. But often, we were targets. We were freshman and computer-geek freshman at that. At lunchtime the jocks would kick our chairs, or push us down onto the table from behind. They would knock our food trays onto the floor, trip us or throw food as we were walking by. When we sat down, they would pelt us with candy from another table. In the hallways, they would push kids into lockers and call them names while their friends stood by and laughed at the show. In gym class, they would beat kids up in the locker room because the teachers weren't around.

Seniors at Columbine would do things like pour baby oil on the floor, then literally "go bowling" with freshman; they would throw the kid across the floor, and since he couldn't stop, he crashed right into other kids while the jocks pointed and giggled. The administration finally put a stop to it after a freshman girl slipped and broke her arm.

One guy, a wrestler who everyone knew to avoid, liked to make kids get down on the ground and push pennies along the floor with their noses. This is what happened during school hours, as kids were passing from one class to another. Teachers would see it and look the other way. "Boys will be boys," they'd say, and laugh (50).

Dylan Klebold actually videotaped an incident of harassment of himself and Eric. He was holding the camera and taping as he, Eric, and a boy named Mike were walking down a corridor in Columbine High School (Jefferson County Sheriff's Office 2003). As they walked down the hall, they would ask approaching students, mostly girls, to wave and say hello to the camera, which they did quite willingly. In the middle of the wide corridor down which they were walking was a double archway. The boys were headed toward the right archway. Approaching them from the opposite direction was a group of four boys; one was quite large, weighing well over 200 pounds, and wore a sweatshirt that said, "Columbine Football." Instead of keeping to the right, the four boys moved through the left archway just before Eric, Mike, and Dylan entered it. As the four boys walked by, the one with the football shirt walked to Dylan's left, and a taller, thinner boy walked to Dylan's right. In the split second before they passed Dylan,



FIGURE 5.1: *Hall scene videotaped by Dylan Klebold*

the boy on Dylan's left raised his left elbow, and the boy on the right raised his right elbow. The video camera spun to the right and Dylan yelled out, "Aagh." A short burst of laughter from the four boys resounded on the soundtrack as they walked away. As Klebold, Harris, and Mike proceeded through the archway, they muttered something to each other; however, voices were low and inaudible. The tape continued for another thirty seconds during which the boys continued walking down the hall as if nothing had happened.

Apparently such behavior was common enough to be accepted as normative. Figure 5.1 contains a sequence of six frames from the video. On the upper left, Mike, in a white shirt, is on the left, and Eric, in the black shirt, is on the right. Between them are the four male students as they approach through the arch to

their left. In the frame on the upper right, the boys are passing each other, with the boy in the football shirt on the left, followed by the boy in the red shirt. Notice that as they pass, Eric has lowered his head and moved ahead of Mike. A third boy is on the extreme right. In the middle left frame, the right elbow of the boy on Dylan's left can be seen as can the right elbow of the boy on his right. Mike is in the middle. The camera begins swinging to the right. In the middle right frame, the camera is pointing down. Mike has turned to his right, and the upraised elbow of the boy on Dylan's right can be seen. On the bottom left is a blurred frame of the lockers to Dylan's right, as the camera has turned about sixty-five degrees to the right before swinging back. To the lower right, Eric and Mike walk toward the doors at the end of the corridor. Conversation continues as if nothing has happened. The boys turn left at the corner at the end of the hallway.

The abusive behavior by The Predators extended well beyond the grounds of Columbine High School. RH and several other athletes were convicted of trashing a home in April 1998 (Adams and Russakoff 1999; Kurtz 1999). A member of the Trenchcoat Mafia stated the following:

RL: And what kind [of] experiences [did] you have in terms of harassment?

SJ: Harassment and that sort, um, I personally suffered severe harassment.

RL: Why don't you tell me about it.

SJ: Almost on a daily basis, finding death threats in my locker. We're talking about going in detail. It was bad. People ... who I never even met, never had a class with, don't know who they were to this day. I didn't drive at the time I was in high school; I always walked home. And every day when they'd drive by, they'd throw trash out their window at me, glass bottles. I'm sorry, you get hit with a glass bottle that's going forty miles an hour, that hurts pretty bad. Like I said, I never even knew these people, so didn't even know what their motivation was. But this is something I had to put up with nearly every day for four years.

DL: Did they wear white hats?

SJ: Sometimes they wore baseball caps. I could never really get a good look at them, too busy dodging stuff.

RL: Why do you think that you were targeted?

SJ: I would assume that it was just because I was an outcast, different; I didn't fit into any of the groups (Recorded April 10, 2003).

Eric Harris, in his journals, also complained of being the target of objects thrown from cars on his way home. Brooks Brown related the following

experience to a reporter (Adams and Russakoff 1999): “This past year, they [Harris and Klebold] and friend Brooks Brown were outside school when a carload of athletes, wearing their trademark white caps, threw a bottle at them, which shattered at their feet. Brown recalled Klebold saying, ‘Don’t worry, man, it happens all the time’” (A1).

In the wake of the shootings, a reporter interviewed a member of the Trenchcoat Mafia who otherwise remained anonymous. He related the following incident (Greene 1999): “While the teen biked home from school, he said, jocks would ‘speed past at 40, 50 mph’ and toss pop cans or cups full of sticky soda at him. Sometimes they threw rocks or even sideswiped his bike with their cars.

Although The Predators were the major source of the bullying, they were not the only ones who attempted to intimidate their peers. IG retold the story of a fellow student who spread false rumors about his sexual orientation. Another student, who admitted that he had been harassed, seemed to accept such behavior as normal in high school:

RL: When you were at Columbine, were you harassed or bothered by other students in any way?

AM: Yeah. I think a lot of people were. It’s just high school, I guess. I mean I wasn’t in the popular crowd, but I had friends who were popular and stuff, but I think everybody got picked on at one point or another (Recorded May 20, 2003).

Another former student told a much darker, and in retrospect, scary, story about harassment and intimidation of her brother, a special-education student with learning disabilities:

EK: Harris and Klebold . . . would follow my brother around and threaten they were going to kill him. It got to the point where my brother didn’t want to go to school at all, because he was very intimidated by them. And my parents got the administration involved, and said, “Hey, these two kids are threatening my son that they’re going to kill him, and my son doesn’t want to go to school or anything like that.” Basically all the administration did was call Eric and Klebold into the office, have a talk with them, but nothing happened. Like they stopped threatening my brother, but nothing, you know, they didn’t like punish them or anything like that.

RL: But they did get them to stop threatening your brother?

EK: Yes.

RL: And that Harris and Klebold spent the better part of a semester harassing and intimidating your brother?

EK: I'd say it was for a month or two. And my brother said that they'd be outside of a good majority of his classes; they'd follow him to the next one. He said it seemed like they were always there, and that he didn't want to go to school because he was outright scared of them, and he was in tears when he told my mom that he didn't want to go to school because of these kids (Recorded May 12, 2003).

## THE VISIBILITY OF BULLYING

How visible was bullying at Columbine high school? According to many students, bullying was an everyday occurrence. Obviously, the recipients of bullying claimed that it was widespread and that it was highly visible. However, numerous students, faculty members, and Principal DeAngelis claimed that bullying was rare. Once the media began focusing on bullying and accusing the faculty and administration of tolerating it, many students and adults became highly defensive about the image of Columbine High, denying the existence of predatory relationships in the high school. Not surprisingly, such denial was most often found among students in the leading crowd and the administration. The following was reported in an interview with several students who were members of the leading group:

MS1: The whole thing about jocks is not true. Like jocks or football players run the school. We are the same as anybody else. It's the same in every other school I've been to. I've been to Chatfield, Heritage schools. It's the exact same everywhere else. There are cliques in high school no matter where you go. [Another student interjects "yes."] People say there is a lot of stereotyping, but there's not.

MS2: Kids don't get picked on in the halls.

MS1: Yeah.

MS2: Kids are treated the same. The administration does a great job.

MS3: I think Columbine is more accepting of people than most schools.

MS2: Yeah. They may call them "cliques" or whatever, but, like, this is my group of friends; it's not like I necessarily don't like other people, but these are my friends; they are the people I hang out with

more often than anybody else. It has nothing to do with, like, tension between them being a skater and me being a jock. That's middle school stuff. That's out of the window.

RL: So there is no harassment that goes on?

MS2: No, there's harassment, but there's no more harassment [at Columbine] than any other high school.

MS1: Yeah. Probably less.

MS2: ...I've seen a lot worse at Chatfield [relative to] Columbine. I've seen at Chatfield, "You're a freshman," and they'll throw them up against the locker. Sometimes I've seen a kid break his arm because of it. At Columbine, it's not like that at all (Recorded May 9, 2003).

Another student, who, although not a member of the leading crowd, was a high-status inbetween, stated the following:

RL: What was the climate like inside the school? Were there people who lorded over other people, and engaged in systematic harassment, or was it fairly copasetic?

IG: I wouldn't call it systematic harassment. I don't think anyone showed up on any particular day and said, "I'm going to make fun of or harass this person or this group of people today. Everybody kind of understood where the boundaries were, kind of "this clique doesn't talk to this clique" and the mechanics of it were very well understood. There was definitely resentment among the cliques. I mean I'm not a big fan of jocks. I'll tell you that right now.

RL: Okay. Did you ever see any physical intimidation?

IG: A little bit, but only from one individual. An individual by the name of RH. He ...

RL: He's the wrestler.

IG: He was a wrestler, but his little brother got more attention than he did. He was a much better wrestler. RH's a head case, to say the least. I mean, he got kicked out of the school he was in before for some violent act, and we landed him. I don't know how. But he was a jerk. And he would intimidate people physically. That was what he was all about. I mean, there were so many different stories about how RH did this, that, or the other. There were times that you could see him using his size and using his, I guess you could say "prowess," to intimidate people. He even tried it with me once, and he asked

me why I had quit the football team. I just looked at him and said, "It's none of your business. I wanted to swim anyway." He went, "Okay." That's really the only individual I ever saw who really got violent. I mean, there were fights, but nothing of real merit, and there weren't any knock down, drag out brawls in the school. If anything started, a teacher was there to break up things. For the most part, everybody either knew their place, or they got along. There wasn't any real—I didn't see anything as far as clique wars, or anything like that. Like I said, everybody kind of knew their place (Recorded April 10, 2003).

This particular point of view was held by Principal DeAngelis, who said,

DE: I've been here twenty-five years, and I'll bet you that I can count on the fingers of two hands, the number of fights we've had in school. Not that they don't occur off campus. But I'll tell you, some of the worst fights we've ever had in this school were between two females. Hair pulling, and biting, and scratching ... I never want to get in the way of a female fight. But usually, we're in a situation where if I walk up and say "knock it off," they stop. They're hoping someone will break it up. There wasn't a lot of violence in the school. Was there bullying going on? There was bullying going on. The kids that were bullying. ... The kids were going home and telling their parents, and their parents were calling me (Recorded April 28, 2004).

The dominant view about bullying and harassment was that it occurred, but it was relatively rare. The administration was aware of The Predators, but figured that they had the situation under control. However, Principal DeAngelis claimed, rightly, that students are not going to harass and intimidate their peers in front of adult authorities. Therefore, the vast majority of harassment and intimidation occurred outside the purview of faculty, staff, and administration. Because of this, many school officials radically underestimated the amount of violence that occurred in their school. This was in evidence in the investigation of the Colorado State Attorney General's Office into bullying in schools (Sanko 2000). The investigation included thirty high schools in Colorado. Students routinely reported dramatically more incidences of school violence and drug abuse than administrators. Garbarino and deLara (2002), in their study of bullying, reported that parents and professional educators were unaware of the level of violence experienced by adolescents:

It is one thing for adults to determine that a school environment is safe based upon their experience of it or their perceptions of day-to-day life. It is quite another thing for the students to declare that same school to be safe. The adults may feel safe, for instance, because they have power. Students overwhelmingly reported teachers and other adults on the school grounds do not have any clue about how many actual incidents of physical and emotional violence and harassment occur in the course of a day (34–35).

This was certainly the case at Columbine High School. Not only were the adults unaware of the level of predation, but so were the majority of students. Recall the testimony of IG, who, when attending a Youth Advisory Council of Jefferson County School District days before the shooting, during discussions about rampage shootings, such as those in Jonesboro, Arkansas, and Paducah, Kentucky, thought that the idea of a rampage shooting at Columbine High School was “crazy.” IG was not the only student who was deluded by the seeming pacifism of Columbine’s halls. Because of the extreme polarization of the student peers structure at Columbine High School, literally two perspectives existed about bullying and harassment; those students who adopted the dominant perspective downplayed or, as in the case of IG, did not perceive the predation occurring routinely. Kurtz (1999) reported:

At Brooke Gibson’s high school, nasty nicknames were the norm. “Nigger lover” was what they called her when she listened to rap. “Dyke” when she cut her blond hair short.

At the school her sister Layn attended, nicknames might poke fun at someone’s shirt color, but never their skin color or sexual orientation.

It was the same school.

Columbine ( 4A).

As a matter of fact, students may have witnessed such intimidation but redefined it as kids having fun, as did Brooke Gibson’s sister, Layn. This self-justification was asserted by members of the leading crowd and their hangers-on not as predatory behavior but as mutual friends kidding each other. Kurtz (1999) reported, “‘They were kind of like bullies,’ said Dave Deidel, a star athlete who graduated this year. ‘But most of the “bullying” was aimed at fellow athletes, and it was all in fun,’ Deidel said” (4A). Similarly this researcher recorded the following:

RL: Why do you like [Columbine] so much?



MS1: Everybody gets along. I have never seen any bullying. In disagreements among people, I have never seen anybody go out of their way to make people uncomfortable or anything.

RL: Has anybody here been harassed?

MS2: The only harassment that occurs is harassment between your friends. ... It's not like, "Oh, that is a nerd, let's go pick on him." The media has a view on Columbine, they don't understand, because they hear some words. They don't know because they haven't been in the building to see what goes on between classes ... (Recorded May 9, 2003).

The dominant view of harassment literally defined it out of existence. It's not harassment at all, but just friends having a little fun among themselves. Yet, according to the outcast students, they were targeted for abuse by the jocks because they were at the bottom of the peer status structure. Although anyone who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time could be confronted by the jocks, the outcasts were the preferred targets of the jocks and were harassed mercilessly on a daily basis. The testimony above by SJ, Eric Harris's angry rantings on the Trenchcoat Mafia web site, Dylan Klebold's casual remarks to Brooks Brown that they were targets of objects thrown from cars all the time, indicate the ubiquity of the harassment. Another member of the Trenchcoat Mafia provided similar testimony:

RL: Did you ever experience any harassment or anything like that when you were [at Columbine]?

ED: Every day (Recorded May 10, 2003).

This kind of predatory behavior, although primarily the province of the jocks, was apparently widespread in Columbine. IG described above how he was harassed by another student, which led to a physical confrontation between himself and the smaller student that put a stop to the harassment.

ED transferred from Columbine to an alternative school because of the treatment he experienced there. When interviewed by the police in the investigation of the shootings because he was identified as a member of the Trenchcoat Mafia, even though he was not enrolled at Columbine High School at the time, he indicated that he had transferred because of harassment by students and faculty. This raises a serious question about the role of adults in the perpetuation of predatory relationships among the students at Columbine High School.

## THE ROLE OF ADULTS IN HARASSMENT

Most adults were not only unaware of how much bullying and intimidation occurred in the halls of Columbine, but they were also ignorant of what constituted bullying and intimidation. Numerous statements by students indicated that faculty, especially teachers who were also coaches, either inadvertently or openly encouraged or participated in the harassment or humiliation of students. Principal DeAngelis has continually defended the school and the faculty against accusations of systematic harassment. He has maintained throughout that harassment was not a serious problem at Columbine High School. DeAngelis was most defensive about the putative role that faculty played in encouraging bullying. In an interview, he stated the following:

[O]ne of the things that really bothered me [was] when they said bullying was going on and teachers would just turn their heads the other way. Oh, I'm not saying bullying wasn't happening, but as far as teachers turning the other way ... letting a lot of kids get by with it; I'm sorry, that's not the case (Recorded April 28, 2004).

However, a staff member told this researcher the following:

RL: So you have some insight into the internal climate of the school. What about the roles of the teacher in violence prevention, and things like that?

L: I would say there were probably several staff members that would intervene, but I think there's a huge portion would not intervene and felt it was more administrative responsibility. [However,] the administration wasn't willing to tackle some of those things ... (Recorded May 12, 2003).

Yet far more serious accusations about the faculty aiding and abetting student harassment were reported in the media and to this researcher by students who had been victimized in situations where faculty members were active participants. The following was related to me by ED after telling me that he was harassed on a daily basis:

RL: Can you describe a typical instance for me?

ED: A typical instance would be one of the more popular people because for some reason they felt like it, like better people, just decided to insult me and my friends, and it was ... another of those things that really frustrated me. Because they would be there, obviously specifically picking on me, with teachers standing nearby or other faculty members, and if I did anything to stand up for myself, such as return the insult with repartee, I would be the one who would get in trouble if anybody did. Most of the time there was [a problem], the teachers just ignored it, probably the best thing they could have done. But every once in a while they would ignore it, or in one particular case, they kind of joined in.

RL: Can you describe it to me? What I need is specific instances. ...

ED: One time that I can recall, quite clearly, I was sitting in the lunchroom in my free hour, just talking with my friends, and the guy who was most popular at the time. ... He would come down ... it seemed like he was trying to pick a fight with me or just trying to belittle me, and one of the—he happened to be the star player on one of the wrestling teams—but I don't think it was his coach, but like an assistant coach or something, who also happened to be the vice principal at the time, came up and also joined in.

RL: What did the vice principal say?

ED: It wasn't really that he said anything. He was kind of in there, cheering him on. Basically the "attaboy" type of thing (Recorded May 10, 2003).

Similarly, a female member of the leading crowd told a story of her public humiliation by a coach. The interview was with two former Columbine students. As CL related the story, SK, who witnessed the incident, confirmed her version.

CL: Did you guys [NB: the interviewers] ever hear about the megaphone incident?

RL: Not that I can remember.

CL: One of the teachers was using the megaphone. [To SK] Tell me you remember that.

SK: I remember it. I'm starting to remember who. ...

CL: Coach T. You know the megaphones you use for police to call people?

SK: He'd walk down the fucking halls with it.

CL: And he would stand in the hallways during passing period and make fun of kids, like oh, you look like a fag, or like, cool backpack, or you guys are holding hands, just like pick on individual people. And my personal incident with that, which ended it for a little while; he let RH have that megaphone for a little while. So RH's picking on people until he sees me.

SK: This is [Coach] T who's now in charge of the Bible Club.

CL: Right.

DL: Bible Club in the school?

SK: Oh my God, yeah. ...

CL: Well RH sees me in the hallway with LJ, and he doesn't like LJ. ... So he decides to shout profanities over the megaphone about me, like CL's a slut, CL has sex with all the guys at Columbine, she's been passed around the football team.

SK: I remember this.

CL: And I was horrified, just like, 'cause everyone was staring at me and laughing, everybody. And Coach T, the look on his face was like, "Uh oh, I'm going to get in trouble for this one." So he takes the megaphone back from RH, and that's it. Nothing ever came of it. That was it. I was horrified. Over a loud speaker, saying those things about me.

DL: What did the other kids, general group of kids that heard it... ?

CL: Laughing. They were laughing.

DL: Nobody was as horrified as you.

SK: Some of us were. We couldn't act it. It was a bad school. It was not fun.

CL: *And those were like daily occurrences* (Recorded April 20, 2004, emphasis added).

Other investigators reported similar complaints by other students who attended Columbine high school. For example, Adams and Russakoff (1999) reported the following:

The state wrestling champ was regularly permitted to park his \$100,000 Hummer all day in a 15-minute space. A football player was allowed to tease a girl about her breasts in class without fear of retribution by his teacher, also the boy's coach. The sports trophies were showcased in the front hall—the artwork, down a back corridor.

Columbine High School is a culture where initiation rituals meant upperclass wrestlers twisted the nipples of freshman wrestlers until they

turned purple and tennis players sent hard volleys to younger teammates' backsides. Sports pages in the yearbook were in color, a national debating team and other clubs in black and white. The homecoming king was a football player on probation for burglary.

All of it angered and oppressed Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, leading to the April day when they staged their murderous rampage here, killing 13 and wounding 21.

Columbine may be no different from thousands of high schools in glorifying athletes. But in the weeks since one of the worst school shootings in history, every aspect of what had seemed "normal" is now being re-examined. Increasingly, as parents and students replay images of life at Columbine, they are freeze-framing on injustices suffered at the hands of athletes, wondering aloud why almost no one—not teachers, not administrators, not coaches, not most students, not parents—took the problem seriously.

No one thinks the high tolerance for athletic mischief explains away or excuses the two boys' horrific actions. But some parents and students believe a school wide indulgence of certain jocks—their criminal convictions, physical abuse, sexual and racial bullying—intensified the killers' feelings of powerlessness and galvanized their fantasies of revenge.

In one episode, they saw state wrestling champion Rocky Wayne Hoffschneider shoving his girlfriend into a locker, in front of a teacher, who did nothing, according to a close friend. "We used to talk about Rocky a lot," said the friend, who asked not to be identified. "We'd say things like 'He should be in jail for the stuff he does.'" Another friend of Klebold's, Andrew Beard, remembers distinctly Klebold's rage at four football players' "getting off" after destroying a man's apartment last year (A1).

Kurtz (1999) also reported instances in which faculty and staff members seemed to be unresponsive to the complaints of students who were harassed by members of the football and wrestling teams:

Being different at Columbine ... was difficult for Brooke Gibson. ... Gibson wore her blond hair long when short hair was the style in junior high. Before graduating in 1996, she cut her hair short like a boy's when other girls had long hair. For this she was called lesbian and dyke.

She didn't bother to report it to an administrator or counselor. Nor did she report the boy who told her his injured ankle might feel better

if Gibson gave him oral sex. She said she didn't see the point. She felt nothing would have come of it. She was a 100-pound girl. Her tormentors were star jocks. . . .

Brooke Gibson still has questions about the 1994 weight lifting class where she tried to report harassment by athletes. It started with the radio. She told male athletes in the class she wanted to listen to rap. They wanted to listen to '70s rock. They called her a "nigger lover." Then, she said, they suggested she have sex with a black student in the class. She said she reported one boy to counselor Charles Shom. "He denied it, and nobody believed it happened," Gibson said. "They were like 'Oh, all right, whatever, some little mediocre girl'"(4A).

Garbarino and deLara (2002) pointed out that one of the most risky acts students can do is to inform an adult about the behaviors of their peers. There is no assurance that it will be handled properly by the adult authority. A student revealed the following:

At Columbine, here's how [conflict resolution] worked. . . . It started off sophomore year, TS was one of RH's right hand men, and TS came up to the smokers one day, and he wanted to bum a cigarette from me, and I refused. I said "no," because I only had like three left—I don't remember why. I had a good reason, but it wasn't just because I didn't like him. So his friends grabbed me and threw me up against a chain link fence and pounded my stomach. I fell on the ground. A teacher saw this, and they pulled us in for conflict resolution with Mr. Collins, my school counselor. He then did this thing with TS and me where he had us talk through the whole thing. He had us go through all the problems we were having, blah, blah. Afterwards, [TS] and his friends found me outside behind the temporary [bungalow] at Columbine where they had first aid classes, oddly enough. They threw me into it, and they kicked me in the face a number of times. I never told anyone again about TS. He continued to beat me mercilessly up until my senior year (Recorded May 13, 2003).

Although the student did not alert the adult authorities, the situation came to the attention of the adults, who, although well-meaning, bungled the conflict resolution process, failed to report physical violence to the appropriate authorities, failed to inform parents, and failed to follow up on the incident. Ineptness or disregard by adult authorities often creates situations worse than those they

attempt to solve. When authorities, such as Principal DeAngelis, ask why students do not inform them of their problems, the answer is that too many of them have had bad experiences in doing so.

Although The Predators denied their participation in harassing and humiliating their peers to the media (Adams and Russakoff 1999; Kurtz 1999), one member let down his guard and told a reporter for *Time Magazine* the following:

Columbine is a clean, good place except for those rejects [NB: outcast students, including Klebold and Harris]. Most kids didn't want them here. They're into witchcraft. They were into voodoo dolls. Sure, we teased them. But what you expect with kids who come to school with weird hairdos and horns on their hats? It's not just jocks; the whole school's disgusted with them. They're a bunch of homos, grabbing each others' private parts. If you want to get rid of someone, usually you tease 'em. So the whole school would call them homos, and when they did something sick, we'd tell them, "You're sick and that's wrong." [Quoted in Garbarino and deLara (2002), 79].

The candor of this predator suggests that in addition to having fun at the expense of fellow students, the predators perceived themselves as defending the moral order of the school. They perceived themselves as acting with the will of the majority of the students. The mere presence of the outcast students was judged to be a blot on the pristine nature of Columbine High School, which gave them the right to harass and humiliate them. This astonishing admission raises serious questions about the unintended consequences of faculty members, who were also coaches, in tolerating and, in some cases, abetting the behavior of the predators. Not only does it create a climate in which interpersonal violence is tolerated, but it also justifies in the minds of those who engage in it the harassment of those persons who have been defined as outside the normative standard. That is, the tolerance of predation by adults is *corrupting* (Garbarino and deLara 2002). Not only does it encourage the repetition of such behaviors, but it teaches impressionable young minds that it is all right to treat with disdain and prejudice those who are different. This particular view had some support in the larger community. Adams and Russakoff (1999) quote a parent: "‘They [those students who were outcasts] had no school spirit and they wanted to be different,’ Randy Thurmon, parent of a wrestler and football player, said of the killers. ‘Anyone who shows any kind of school spirit, any pride in the school, they’re accepted.’"

As the evidence above has shown, this particular view of the openness of the internal climate of the school was counterfactual. Although the outcast students

took the brunt of the abuse by the predators, numerous students testified that anybody could be violated if he/she happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. The student elites, both male and female, defended their status quite viciously.

## A TOXIC ENVIRONMENT

These stories raise several issues about the internal context of Columbine High School that evoked numerous complaints from many students. First, male faculty members who were also coaches were perceived by students as encouraging predatory behavior by members of the football and wrestling teams. Several incidents were instigated by the same student who everyone in the school, including faculty and administration, knew engaged in predatory behavior. He had been expelled from his previous school because of his violent predilections. Yet some coaches encouraged his antisocial behavior. Second, many students complained about the hypocrisy of those people who called themselves “Christians” as a way of differentiating themselves as a moral elite from nonobservant Christians or members of mainline Protestant sects. These students engaged in such un-Christian acts as abetting or participating in the public humiliation of others and violence toward the weak, socially different, or those otherwise incapable of defending themselves. Third, many students, especially those at the bottom of the student status structure, perceived a hierarchy of privilege in which those at the top were given special treatment and exempted from punishment except when such behavior could no longer be ignored. Many students thought that such differential treatment was unjust.

## RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

Brooks Brown (2002) was perhaps the most vociferous accuser of the evangelicals, citing their hypocrisy and aggression. In a personal interview, Brown indicated that the leadership of the predatory jocks was identified as part of the group of students who identified themselves as “deep Christians.”

RL: Were there kids who were ... evangelicals who also engaged in physical intimidation ... , I mean other than saying you're going to hell?

BB: RH and his group, they were all Christians. Good little Christians.

RL: Were they practicing evangelicals?



BB: I don't know if they were evangelicals. I don't know what religion most of the kids were; I know that they were deep Christian. I think evangelicals were reborn or born-again. Most of these were born-again, New Age Christianity, whatever the hell it's called. None of them were actually Christian; they just said they were. There's a difference (Recorded in May 13, 2003).

Despite Brooks Brown's antagonism toward proselytizing evangelicals, this statement reveals a certain sympathy toward them. He identified those who call themselves "Christians," but who act toward others in unchristian ways as not truly Christian. Coach T., who was the faculty sponsor of the morning Bible study group called Young Life, had been implicated by at least two students in encouraging predatory behavior. In Chapter 3, the religious overtones of the shooting were discussed in detail; the antagonism toward evangelicals expressed by Klebold and Harris in the basement tapes was elaborated. They reviled deep Christian students for their self-perceptions as moral elite. In addition, the aggressiveness of evangelical community in attempting to define the killings as specifically an attack on them without consideration of alternative motivations, the hijacking by evangelicals of the nationally-televised memorial service on April 25, 1999, attempts by evangelical preachers to use the shootings to expand the movement and recruit new members, the beatification of Rachel Scott and Cassie Bernall as martyrs in the defense of their beliefs, and vilification of Lutheran minister, Don Marxhausen, who, as a consequence, lost his congregation and temporarily moved away from the area, indicate the aggressiveness and viciousness with which the evangelical community could act. In response to criticism of the takeover of the national memorial service, leaders of the evangelical community maintained, in effect, that this was their territory and those who did not like it could move away, a local version of "America, love it or leave it."

Also in Chapter 3, several young women who were former Columbine students complained about members of Young Life claiming piety, but who were heavy partiers, drinkers, dope-smokers, and sexual players. The fact that the worst predators on campus also identified themselves as deep Christians, who were also abetted by the coach who was the sponsor of Young Life, tended to make many Columbine students cynical about the religious commitment of their peers. It was not at all uncommon for students to make distinctions between those people, such as Rachel Scott, who seemed to embody the Christian ideal of acting out of love, and people such as RH and LJ, who also claimed to be deep Christians, but who bullied, harassed, and intimidated their peers.

Religious intolerance was also in evidence in the form of anti-Semitism. Very few Jewish students lived in the Columbine area and attended Columbine High School. The following incident was reported extensively (Adams and Russakoff 1999; Kurtz 1999). Several versions of the story exist. However, RH identified as a “deep Christian,” and a fellow football player, early in the 1996–1997 school year, began harassing Jonathan Green in gym class, first by saying, “There’s another Jew in the oven,” every time they made a basket. The intimidation escalated. Adams and Russakoff (1999) wrote:

“They pinned him [Green] on the ground and did ‘body twisters,’” Greene said. “He got bruises all over his body. Then the threats began about setting him on fire and burning him.”

Stephen Green, Jonathan’s father, went to Place [the gym coach], DeAngelis and his son’s guidance counselor. “They said, ‘This stuff can happen.’ They looked at me like I was a problem,” he said. Green called the school board, which notified the police. Hoffschneider and the other athlete were charged with harassment, kicking and striking, court records show, and sentenced to probation. But Hoffschneider was allowed to continue his football and wrestling (A1).

Kurtz (1999) noted that Stephen Green, Jonathan’s father, claimed that the administration did nothing until he threatened a lawsuit, after which, the Jefferson County Board of Education called the police. In another version, Coach Place called the boys into his office and called the Jefferson County Sheriff’s department, which cited the two boys for “ethnic intimidation.” This story was retold to this researcher by several persons.

## INJUSTICE

The most serious and corrosive result of adult sanctioning of predatory behavior was a sense among the students of powerlessness and a lack of justice. For example, ED, who was verbally harassed by RH in the presence of a vice principal, perceived himself as in a no-win situation: If he responded verbally to RH’s taunts, he would get into trouble; if he did not respond, he would be publicly humiliated. He did not respond and eventually transferred to another school. Brooks Brown (Brown and Merritt 2002) summarized the feelings of injustice voiced by students at the bottom of the peer structure:

If people wanted to know what Columbine was like, I'd tell them. I'd tell them about the bullies who shoved the kids they didn't like into lockers, called them "faggots" every time they walked past. I'd tell them about the jocks who picked relentlessly on anyone they considered to be below them. The teachers turned a blind eye to the brutalization of their pupils, because those pupils weren't the favorites.

I told them about the way those who were "different" were crushed, and fights happened so regularly outside school that no one even paid attention. I told what it was like to live in constant fear of other kids who'd gone out of control, knowing full well that the teachers would turn a blind eye. After all, those kids were their favorites. We were the troublemakers.

"Eric and Dylan are the ones responsible for creating this tragedy," I told them. "However, Columbine is responsible for creating Eric and Dylan" (163).

Perhaps one of the most serious sources of injustice was the perceived differential treatment of RH, who has been identified by numerous students as the prime source of predation on campus. Stories abound about personal confrontations and witnesses of violence to students, including female students, whom he physically and verbally abused. SK related a story about how he turned a corner in the hallway and bumped into RH and was beaten up. He and his crowd of wrestling and football teammates abused and humiliated fellow students at will. Every student that was interviewed by this researcher knew him either first-hand or by reputation. One student (IG), who identified himself as having relatively high peer status though not a member of the leading crowd, referred to RH as a "head case."

The students at the bottom of the social structure, including members of the Trenchcoat Mafia, could all relate a story in which they had been verbally or physically attacked by him. Although the moniker "Trenchcoat Mafia" was meant as a pejorative, the Trenchcoaters, in an act of cultural defiance, turned it into a badge of honor. Media reports told of RH and his friends stuffing a member of the Trenchcoat Mafia into a trash can (Adams and Russakoff 1999). Although the media did not mention names, the individual in the news report confirmed it in an interview with the researcher.

What bothered students the most, especially those at the bottom of the peer social structure, was the perception that, because RH and his posse, popularly known as the "Steroid Poster Boys," were star athletes, they received deferential treatment. Prendergast (1999) interviewed a female student who was a

freshman and a goth, putting her at the bottom of the student status hierarchy, who, echoing students quoted above, indicated her sense of vulnerability and injustice at the hands of the jocks.

There were a lot of things Melissa Sowder didn't like about Columbine High School. The bullies, for instance. They were football players, mostly. They shoved her friends in the halls and threw snowballs or bottles at them on the way home. Sometimes they shoved her, too. Who needed it? "Teachers would see them push someone into a locker, and they'd just ignore it," she says. "I think they were afraid of the students. They didn't stop half the fights in that school."

According to Prendergast (1999), Melissa Sowder was a student whom the administration identified as a problem:

In her first few weeks at Columbine, Sowder ditched class several times, resulting in a parent conference and restrictions imposed on her ability to leave campus during the day. But when she tried to complain to teachers about harassment by jocks, she was told, "Deal with it," she says.

Prior to the attack on the school on April 19, 1999, Miss Sowder was interviewed by a counselor after being late to a class (Prendergast 1999). He asked her what she thought during the day when she was in school. She told him she thought about blowing up the school. She was given a one-day suspension, and her parents were called. The school authorities viewed her comment as a threat, and her behavior was closely monitored by faculty and staff.

Although such thoughts were anathema to the vast majority of students attending Columbine High School, students who were fiercely proud of its athletic and academic achievements, such sentiments were quite common among the outcasts. They felt that they were being unjustly treated. A well-known incident, reported above from a different perspective (Adams and Russakoff 1999) was recounted by Huerter (2000):

I spoke with some ... Trenchcoat Mafia [members]. They talked about not being picked on as a group, but about individuals being picked on when they were separated. Specifically, females remembered being called "sluts" and "Nazi lesbians" by jocks. Other times there were accounts of members being shoved, thrown into walls, pushed and on and least one occasion having a bag of ice water thrown onto a Trenchcoat Mafia member by a table of "jocks." On this particular occasion the

jocks and the Trenchcoat Mafia were in the cafeteria, the bag was thrown, words were exchanged, and both groups got up to go outside and fight. “Sid,” a security person, intervened and escorted those in the “Trenchcoat Mafia” to administration. The “Trenchcoat Mafia” members were suspended for 3 days while none of the “jocks” were taken to administration nor received any apparent disciplinary action (3–4).

The Huerter Report (2000) contains an enumeration of incidents where jocks were given preferential treatment or untoward leniency, or other students were punished in a given incident where the jocks were not. One of the more egregious examples was the way in which the administration dealt with a restraining order issued by a judge against the star fullback of the football team. His girlfriend found him to be extremely possessive and emotionally out-of-control. She told the researcher the following:

The boyfriend I was with ... he was taking supplements, I guess you could say, to perform better in football. And some of those supplements caused you to have outages and your emotions are heightened, and so I had to deal with that, and I had broken up with him, but he wouldn't take no for an answer, I guess you could say. And on a repeated basis, he would come to my house when I wasn't there. He would follow me to work, and he was always threatening to beat up people. He was stalking, basically, legally it was stalking. So I ended up getting a restraining order. And he violated the restraining order and he went to jail (Recorded April 30, 2004).

The parents met with Principal DeAngelis about enforcing the temporary restraining order. The male student continued to violate it, and DeAngelis stated that the school would have difficulty honoring the restraining order and suggested that they would have somebody follow her around at school, which was not acceptable to her and her family, because they perceived themselves as being victims and that if there was to be accommodation, it should be done on the part of the aggressor. This occurred just prior to the shootings on April 20, 1999. She told this researcher that while the assault was occurring in the school, she had gone home to lunch, had locked the doors to her house, and had pulled down the shades in an effort to hide from her former boyfriend. He came to the house, banged on the door, yelled that he knew she was there, and claimed that he could not live without her.

According to Huerter (2000), the male aggressor was allowed to stay in school. Because he was a junior and she was a senior, when classes reconvened

at Chatfield High School following the shootings, she was allowed not to return to classes without penalty to her grades. Her former boyfriend took full advantage of the fact that he was in school and she was not by publicly disparaging her, claiming, as did RH, that she was sleeping around with the football team and that she was a slut.

The balance of the year at Chatfield High School was not devoted to academics but was directed toward counseling students and providing them a communal experience in which they could deal with their traumatic experiences. Many Columbine students reflected on that period in which the status hierarchy literally melted away and students who had never talked to each other experienced an incredible sense of collective identity and community. A student who was in the school during the shootings noted:

You know, one thing that I noticed that really affected me about it afterwards, was that even the people that hated me before, after the shooting happened, when we saw each other, when we basically recognized, you just, all of those grudges went away. Everything went away. You just hugged that person. And you felt that they were really happy to see you (Recorded May 13, 2003).

Thus, the girlfriend ended up paying doubly for the transgressions of her boyfriend, who, by violating the terms of the restraining order, committed a felony. One must ask, as some students did, if this had happened between a member of the Trenchcoat Mafia and his girlfriend, whether such an outcome would have been adjudicated by the administration. Not only was she deprived of the healing forces of a community coming together in sharing their sorrow and pain, but her boyfriend was given the opportunity to besmirch her reputation without her having a chance to defend herself. Even more egregiously, this incident was carried over to the next year by members of the faculty. Huerter (2000) reported that a shop teacher, in front of the victim's brother declared the issue as "bullshit." The victim's mother was informed by another parent that Columbine staff members were repeating her boyfriend's accusation that she was being passed around by members of the football team. Huerter continued:

The young male in question went on to play football at a university. The president, when challenged about having this young man playing on scholarship for that university, stated in a letter that his staff [had] received strong endorsement from Columbine staff about this young man. The university president's letter also stated that he was told from staff at

Columbine that the young man “had never been charged with any wrongdoing, that the allegations filed [against] him were never substantiated and, while there was briefly an *ex parte* restraining order filed against him, it was dropped for lack of evidence to support it” (4).

An unnamed star member of the football team missed the team bus for a football game because he had been arrested and his release from jail was too late to make the bus (Huerter 2000). The coach of the football team had this person tell the rest of the team why he was late and told him that he could not play in the first half of the game. He was allowed in the game during the second quarter. Another player had forgotten his mouthpiece; without it, he was ineligible to play. Instead of having the latecomer provide his mouthpiece, another player was asked to supply his, making him ineligible to play in the game. Huerter noted that the incident left people with the belief that favoritism existed for some jocks; the lesson was that if you were valuable to the team, negative consequences did not flow from bad behavior.

The above story has a companion story that was related to this researcher by CL (Recorded May 13, 2004). Accordingly, one of the predators had rolled his expensive new car and was arrested by the county sheriff for driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI). According to CL, the wrestling coach, needing the arrested student to participate in the wrestling meet, bailed him out of jail, and drove him straight to the meet.

Several incidences were reported of students refusing to go to school or demanding a transfer because of intimidation by the jocks at Columbine. Huerter (2000) mentioned two such incidences. These incidents are probably just the tip of the iceberg, since one of the interviewees for this study, ED, transferred out specifically because of the harassment he experienced and the apparent toleration of such behavior by faculty members.

In addition to the toleration of sexist behavior in several cases described above, a female student wanted to talk to a girlfriend of one of the predator jocks. She called out her name; the predator came over, confronted her, and said if she wanted to know something, she should talk to him. He cornered her against the stairs, continuing to yell, clenching his fists, and calling her names. A male student who attempted to intervene was thrown off by the boyfriend. Finally, two buddies, also jocks, pulled him away from her. She recalled that two faculty members witnessed the incident but did nothing.

Another female student, a freshman, after talking with Dylan Klebold, was accosted by one of the predators who slammed her against the lockers, calling her a “fag lover” for talking with the likes of Dylan. This was quite similar to the

experience of SK, described above, who was confronted by a jock when talking to the girlfriend of the football team captain.

According to Huerter (2000), the bullying by the members of the football team had become so bad that Columbine students started to boycott football games.

In spring 1998, Coach Lowry called a meeting of the football team. He said he and received a letter from the district—they weren't bringing enough people to the games to use the larger Jeffco [NB: Jefferson County] Stadium—so they were going to have to use Trailblazer Stadium. Coach Lowry stated that he wanted all team members to treat everyone with respect *in order to increase attendance*. It was reported that several students had gone to Lowry questioning why they should attend the games when members of the football team were harassing students (7, emphasis added).

Columbine High School is surrounded by acres of play fields and practice fields, but it does not have its own football stadium. It plays its games, as do all Jefferson County high schools, in stadiums provided by the Jefferson County School District. It is remarkable that Coach Lowry demanded improved behavior of football team members for the purpose of increasing attendance at games. This kind of mixed message seems to indicate that harassment of students would be all right if it did not suppress attendance at football games, making it necessary for the Columbine Rebel football team to play their games in the less prestigious, smaller stadium.

Among those students who were subjected to predatory behavior on the part of the jocks, a pervasive sense of powerlessness and injustice was felt. Brooks Brown (Brown and Merritt 2002) articulated those feelings in relationship to Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold:

Kids are raised on the playgrounds of their schools, where they learned that “might makes right” and that physical brawn is a far more important asset than intelligence and cunning. Yet they also learned that when they fight back, they're punished by the people [who] were supposed to protect them and dispense justice.

Dylan [Klebold] was a smart kid who could see the injustices of the world as clearly as I could. He was frustrated by them, and, like many other kids he saw a bleak future for our generation.

Eric [Harris] felt the same way. ... And like Dylan, Eric saw the injustices of the world quite clearly, even as he was getting beat up in



the high school locker room or jumping to avoid the glass bottles thrown at him out of the passing cars of Columbine football players (20).

The student culture was rife with stories about the special treatment of the jocks, especially those who were members of The Predators. Huerter (2000) reported that there was a perception on the part of many students that the school was run by the jocks; if you were not a jock, you didn't fit in. There can be no denying that students perceived the campus as being run by The Predators. However, Huerter disputed that perception, noting that there were no posters in the hallways cheering on the football team. She stated, "While I believe there's a strong emphasis on sports, after reading three editions of 'Red Line,' the school's bulletin, all types of successes were noted" (7). However, she was looking in the wrong place. Her own data suggest that not only did jocks run the school, but they enforced their domination through violence or the threat of violence. It is not posters on the wall or official school news bulletins that determine who rules in adolescent peer culture. It is quite literally who rules the hallways. Without a doubt, the jocks did so without much interference by faculty or administration.

For the outcast students, who were as horrified as anybody at the shootings, empathy existed for Eric and Dylan because they knew how much they had to endure. Several of the outcasts who were interviewed for this study indicated that, in retrospect, they were not surprised by the shootings. They, too, experienced the towering rage generated by feelings of powerlessness in the face of continual humiliation and harassment (Garbarino and deLara 2002).

They were also very much aware of their own isolation as a consequence of the indifference and open hostility of their peers. In addition, as ED noted, many teachers felt similarly about them and did little to disguise it. When the jock, quoted above, said that the outcast students were a blot on the goodness and cleanliness of Columbine High School, he was reflecting the majority view. And that majority view was enforced by The Predators.

## APPEARANCES AND REALITY

Entering Columbine High School on a lovely spring day in 2003, this researcher saw students going about their business, perhaps going to the library, a class, a rehearsal, the gym, the computer center, or out to lunch. The halls were clean and orderly. The students seemed happy and purposeful. Locker doors opened and slammed shut. Students walked around the spacious hallways alone or with peers or in small groups of three or four. Sometimes the talk is quiet; sometimes

it is boisterous. Occasionally, students will be seen running down the halls because they are late for class or their errand is particularly urgent. These observations are expected in a well-run school.

The virtues of Columbine High School have been detailed earlier. It was the flagship high school of southern Jefferson County. It had a reputation for strong academics, a wonderful sports program, and fabulous offerings of extracurricular and enrichment activities. It had a campus a New York City high school teacher could only imagine. People moved into the area especially so their children could attend Columbine High School.

We have also examined the underbelly of Columbine. The student body had a three-tiered class system with the jocks at the top, most of the rest the students in the middle, and the outcasts at the bottom. Although many of the students in the middle resented the jocks/poms/cheerleaders for their snobbishness, viciousness, and willingness to defend their position with violence, they were acceded their role as the leading crowd in the school by virtue of their athletic prowess, physical beauty, personality, or socioeconomic status. The students at the bottom of the peer structure, if not openly vilified, were disparaged and disdained by nearly all students who were not members of that very small group. When they were bullied by the jocks, few students protested; many did what they accused teachers of doing, turning a blind eye to it. A good portion of the students thought that the outcasts invited and deserved the abuse they received.

Every adult this researcher talked to who was asked the question stated that the school was run by the coaches. But what did that mean? One teacher explained it this way:

RL: I was told that coaches run Columbine High School. Do you have any idea what people mean by that?

T: The coaches are the leaders in the school. They don't run the school. The school is run by the administration and the department chairmen—they're the ones who make the policies. The coaches don't run the school. But, like, if you look at the entire faculty, the top faculty members are people that coach. That's just their personality.

RL: I see.

T: But they don't run the school. They can't go to the principal and say, I want this, and this, and this (Recorded April 20, 2004).

A less favorable view of the same phenomenon was described by a parent:

So we've got your bully teachers in that school. And there's a network of them, and they're new coaches. And it's disgusting. And the kids all know it, and the principal. ... The dynamic in the school makes me crazy. It truly does. There is nowhere to go if you are not an athlete in that school. There is nowhere to go for protection. It's sad. It just breaks my heart when you think about it. The problem is they're not helping these kids. These athletes who are getting away with stuff, you know, so that they have a good football team, and you've got to play because we've got to go to State, they're not teaching these kids because now these kids go out into the world and they have these behaviors that they're going to get away with, they're going to break the rules, break the law. They're not helping any of the kids. And there are kids that follow the rules on the football team that don't get to play. This school is not about the kids. This school is about a principal who is reliving his high school years knowing the cheerleaders and the football players. And the coaches that are there are doing the same thing: they want to win; they want to win at all costs. You have teachers there who are wonderful, who have no one to go to when they've got complaints, because Mr. DeAngelis will go in his office and close the door. He doesn't want to know what is going on. And that's the dynamic of that school (Recorded April 30, 2004).

A pastor whose children attended the school stated:

So, our kids survived Columbine. My son went there as well [as my daughter]. He basically stayed on the periphery. The core of the school was jock. I think it still is, but I'm not sure. The core of the school was jock (Recorded April 29, 2004).

What people meant when they said that the school was run by coaches was that the coaches had both formal and informal power. Principal DeAngelis, although a social studies teacher, was also a coach, and a successful one at that, leading the baseball team to two state championships. He was formerly an assistant football coach. In addition, coaches were overrepresented in the administration. The following were excerpted from my field notes:

The first thing I noticed in Mr. DeAngelis's office was a blooming columbine plant on his desk. On the walls were plaques honoring him, the school, and memorializing the victims of the shooting. One small

plaque honored him as “Mr. Baseball,” for his baseball coaching. Several years before, he coached a team that won the state championship. On the wall was a picture of two championship baseball teams. There was a crocheted tapestry that was dedicated to the thirteen victims of the shooting; right under that was a drawing of Dave Sanders with a columbine flower in the background. On my way out of the office, which was cluttered with trophies garnered by the soccer and football teams, I walked over to a hanging trophy case that had more awards by the football, soccer, baseball, and volleyball teams. I think that the football team won the state championship four out of the last five years (Field notes, May 12, 2003).

Across the hall [from Mr. DeAngelis’s office] was a dean’s office that had an entire wall papered with pictures of sports figures (Field notes, April 28, 2004).

It is true, as several reporters (Adams and Russakoff 1999; Greene 1999; Kurtz 1999) have noted, that Columbine puts its athletic contributions on public display more prominently than its academic successes. This researcher’s experience is similar to others who have visited the school. The office was filled with trophies celebrating state championships won by various teams. The hanging trophy case in the middle of the foyer contains some of the most important championship trophies along with footballs signed by members of the victorious teams. Also at the end of the foyer near a hall leading to the athletic facilities is a huge trophy case celebrating athletic victories of the various teams. Next to the gymnasium is a display case that contains sports memorabilia sent to the school in the wake of the shootings, such as signed jerseys from basketball and football stars and a football helmet from the 2000 National Football League champion St. Louis Rams with signatures from the members of the victorious team. In addition, in the hallway leading to the gymnasium is Columbine’s Wall of Fame, celebrating outstanding athletes in the history of Columbine High School.

## MR. DEANGELIS

Mr. DeAngelis, the principal of Columbine High School, is a modest man of unremarkable appearance. After first meeting with him, I described him as follows:

Mr. DeAngelis is about 5' 5" tall, about 190 lbs. He has a shock of black hair with small amounts of silver on the sides. He was dressed in a plaid sports jacket, beige slacks, and a beige shirt that buttoned at the top. It did not have a collar;

it was meant to be worn without a tie. The shirt was well-worn, pilling around his ample waist. He was short, overweight, but had a muscular build (Field notes, May 12, 2003).

In my second meeting with him, he was more relaxed, less stressed, and had lost a few pounds. His entire career in education with the exception of a single year has been at Columbine High School. He graduated from Metropolitan State College in Denver in 1978 with a bachelor's degree in social studies and started teaching at Columbine in 1979. He served as a social studies teacher through 1991, in 1992–1993 he was dean of students for two years, then assistant principal for two years, and was selected principal in 1996. He received a master's degree in secondary education and social studies from the University of Colorado in 1994 and received his administrative certification in the same year. Between 1986 and 1994, he was the coach of the baseball team and assistant coach of the football team. He also supervised basketball and wrestling matches and was the announcer and scorer in those sports. Principal DeAngelis is a sincere and earnest man. He has also developed skills in handling the media and interviewers, such as this author. In my interviews, he focused on the academic aspects of Columbine. Although he acknowledged that sports were important at the high school, he celebrated its academic achievements and the superior extracurricular activities offered by the school. I have heard detractors refer to him as “evil,” and “pathetic,” not so much because of his inherent qualities, but because it was under his leadership that bullying was allowed to occur and that athletics took precedence over all other aspects of high school life, including academics and morality. Principal DeAngelis perceives himself as a fair person, claiming that all students were treated equally and that he even turned his own son in because of an off-the-field escapade (Prendergast 1999). A pastor described him as a wonderfully compassionate man as exemplified by his behavior in a family tragedy:

A lot of people criticize DeAngelis. ... Be that as it may, when the youth worker from the Catholic Church and I were trying to get the family through their kid's suicide—I mean you've got to pick a funeral home, you've got to get clothes picked out, you've got to pick a cemetery—you've got to move people along. A funeral is a wedding in three days. You know all the craziness with a wedding? Well, you've got to do that in three days with a funeral. ... So, our job is to move that along. DeAngelis came in and did the pastoring on the brother, sitting on the bed with him and holding him and all that kind of stuff (Recorded April 30, 2004).

Yet, DeAngelis was a principal who had been a very successful coach in a school where coaches were overrepresented in the administration, and in which athletics were strongly emphasized. Teachers demand that principals defend them from outsiders. Principals who side with parents against the teaching staff do so at their own peril. Even when a faculty member may have done something egregious, the usual response to the parent is to defend the teacher and deal with the problem directly with the teacher, reporting back to the parent what was done. When Principal DeAngelis stated that teachers never abetted or participated in the harassment of students, he was defending his faculty.

Although DeAngelis has certainly had his judgment questioned in the national and local media (Adams and Russakoff 1999; Brown and Merritt 2002; Garbarino and deLara 2002; Von Drehle 1999), only a small minority of parents and community members called for his resignation. Instead of questioning his regime and demanding his immediate resignation in the face of serious allegations of allowing predatory violence in the halls of his school, the community rallied around him and defended him. Any attempts to force him out of the position of principal of Columbine High School were met with strong resistance. As a matter of fact, DeAngelis came out of the shootings more popular than he was prior to them. DeAngelis became a symbol of Columbine's pain, indomitable spirit, and will to recover from the tragedy.

Although numerous parents were unhappy with the way they and their children were treated by Principal DeAngelis, their difficulties were private and individualized. If they did not like Columbine High School, they could attend one of the neighboring schools. To them, as well as to DeAngelis, Klebold and Harris were an aberration; they were a visitation of pure evil in an otherwise model community. The major reason that, in the face of accusations of incompetence and malfeasance, the community stood behind DeAngelis was because he was providing them the kind of high school that they wanted. Certainly, the parents of Columbine High School students did not want academics sacrificed to athletics; however, the fact that Columbine had emerged as a multi-sport state power provided them a sense of collective identity and pride.

## DRUGS

This and the previous chapter have alluded to the various forms of drug use at Columbine. Although drug usage was not the focus of this investigation, it crept

into the data in a variety of ways. Students testified that to party, get drunk, and smoke marijuana was normal, especially among the jocks. I emphasize the word “normal.” That is, within the peer group, this kind of behavior was routine and accepted. Most students that I interviewed who were in attendance at Columbine in 1997 and 1998 knew about the arrest of RH for DUI. Eric Harris, in his Trenchcoat Mafia web site, admitted to dosing on cough syrup. Both he and Dylan Klebold (whose moniker was “VoDKa”) were swigging from a Jack Daniels bottle when they made the basement tapes. Students testified that liquor was easy to get and that the jocks obtained their marijuana from their pals who were “stoners.” In this most conservative community, drugs, especially alcohol, were easy to come by.

Perhaps what was most alarming was the unsubstantiated rumors that members of the football and wrestling teams were taking steroids. The testimony of CL indicated that her boyfriend was on steroids; he would fly into a jealous rage at the slightest provocation. Rumors abounded about the use of steroids by athletes; rumors also indicated that the family of a football team member was supplying steroids and other drugs within the community. With all the rumors, one would think that the administration would investigate steroid usage because it is a serious health problem, especially among adolescents. In addition to “roid rage,” it can generate depression and has been attributed to suicides of several adolescent athletes across the country (Longman 2003). If the administration has looked into the issue, it is not public knowledge.

Much has been made about the possible influence of Luvox on the behavior of Eric Harris (Bergin 1999; Murphy 2001; O’Meara 2001). Luvox is a serotonin-specific reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) in the Prozac family. Eric had first been prescribed Zoloft, another SSRI, when he was diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder following his arrest for the theft of equipment from a truck the previous fall. Subsequently, Zoloft was replaced by Luvox. As noted by the medical community, SSRIs can produce psychotic responses, especially mania and paranoia. However, it is as senseless to suggest that Luvox caused the Columbine shootings as it is to blame it on psychopathology. It may be that Luvox paradoxically intensified Harris’s manic state and sense of persecution. However, planning and preparing for the massacre began long before Eric Harris started taking Zoloft and Luvox. Dylan Klebold had no drugs in his system according to the autopsy (Columbine Research Site 2003). The effects of Luvox on the Columbine shootings are unknown, as the effect of steroids on the behavior of members of the football and wrestling teams is unknown.

## MORAL LESSONS

Social theorist Robert Merton (1957) talked about manifest and latent functions when examining institutions. He noted that institutions may be structured for some overt purpose but takes on other functions that may be covert and unarticulated but, when subjected to sociological analysis, can be unearthed. He also noted that latent functions can often undermine or corrupt manifest functions. There is little dispute that the manifest functions of education are to provide the younger generation with the skills, attitudes, and understandings necessary for positive social participation in a technological society and as a citizen in a democratic society, although citizen education has atrophied over the last two decades. It is undeniable that a major function of the institution of education is moral; over a century ago, sociologist Emile Durkheim (1956) identified the major function of education as providing attitudinal, behavioral, and moral continuity between older and younger generations.

In high schools across the United States, the latent function is to provide the community an identity through sports participation, primarily football. In Columbine, the efforts to have a dominating sports program and to have a nationally ranked football team undermined its ability to provide students with an environment that promoted democratic civic values, that is, an environment where the will of the majority is tempered by the protection of the weak. In this chapter, overwhelming evidence has been presented that indicated that a small minority was able to rule the halls of the school. The vast majority acquiesced and allowed that minority to engage in violence toward a small minority of nonconforming and generally despised students because of their nonconformity. The civic lesson that Columbine High School taught its students was that might makes right, that some citizens are more worthy than others, and that those who express dissent with the dominant perspective or who, for whatever reason, would not or could not conform to the dominant mode, deserve predation, get what they deserve, and have no claim to dignity.

Columbine is, as has been shown, an upper-middle-class, predominantly white Christian community, with a handful of blacks and a small minority of Chicanos, many of whom can only be distinguished by their Hispanic surnames. Residents of southern Jefferson County view themselves racially tolerant and free from discrimination. Ethnic and racial minorities were represented in the student elites. However, as demonstrated above, the jocks were overtly racist (as were Klebold and Harris), sexist, homophobic, and anti-Semitic. They were not afraid of calling other students “nigger lovers”; female students “Nazi-lesbians,” “sluts,”



or “skags” or publicly commenting on their bodies or putative sexual lives; intimidating other males by calling them “homos,” “fags,” or “queers” or telling them to “suck cock”; or to harass Jewish students.

By allowing the predators free reign in the hallways and public spaces and by bending the rules so that bad behavior did not interfere too much with sports participation, the faculty and administration inadvertently created a climate that was rife with discrimination, intimidation, and humiliation. The lack of consistency in the enforcement of rules at Columbine led students, especially those at the bottom, to feel that the school was a dangerous place and that they could not expect justice when appealing to adult authorities. Those at the top of the peer structure adamantly claimed that Columbine was a place where people were respected, regardless of their differences, and that when rules were broken, justice was done. This researcher does not know whether those students really believed this attractive picture of their school to be true or were attempting to fool an outsider. Students at the bottom of the peer structure became cynical about Columbine’s image as the ideal school. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold came to the conclusion that the best way to solve the problem was to blow up the school and kill as many as they could.