



PROJECT MUSE®

---

## Comprehending Columbine

Larkin, Ralph W.

Published by Temple University Press

Larkin, W..

Comprehending Columbine.

Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/45929>

# 6

## ERIC AND DYLAN

**T**O THIS POINT, the focus has been on school and community contexts of the shootings. The perpetrators of the shooting, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, will be examined in depth in this chapter. Several issues will be explored: their family backgrounds, relationships with peers, schooling, psychological issues, their life together in Columbine, and their behavior prior to the assault on the school.

### ERIC HARRIS, INSTIGATOR AND THEORIST

#### *Eric Harris's Background*

Relatively little is known about Eric's background, especially prior to his living in Columbine. He was born in Wichita, Kansas, on April 9, 1981, to Wayne and Kathy Harris (West 1999). His brother, Kevin, was three years older than Eric. Their father, Wayne, spent the majority of his adult life as a pilot of United States Air Force transport planes (Shepard 1999). Throughout his career, he was stationed at eight different bases in Kansas, Ohio, Michigan, and New York State. Before he was forced into retirement because of cutbacks in the military budget, he was stationed at Plattsburgh Air Force Base in upstate New York. In 1993, after Wayne served twenty years in the

military, the family moved into southern Jefferson County where he obtained a job with Flight Safety Services Corporation in nearby Englewood. Kathy was employed part-time as a caterer.

The move to Columbine was a return home. Wayne had grown up in Englewood, which is just a few miles north of Columbine, and had graduated from Englewood High School. His father had been employed as a valet at the Brown Palace Hotel in downtown Denver. Kathy was also a local girl; she was raised in southeast Denver, where her father, a retired military officer, owned and operated a hardware store (Bartels and Crowder 1999).

Media inquiries into the background of the Harris family and Eric in particular uncovered no indications of pathology. The Harrises were characterized as good neighbors, reserved but friendly, and their children seemed to be perfectly normal. When her children were young, Kathy was a stay-at-home mom, tending to the needs of her family. The family was described by acquaintances as an ideal, loving family. According to one media source, former military friends described Eric as smart and cute (Bartels and Crowder 1999). One of Eric's former friends, from Plattsburgh, said in *USA Today* ("Massacre Foreshadowed by Gunmen's Videos" 1999) in the wake of the shootings, "My mouth just dropped," former classmate Kyle Ross said. "He was a typical kid. He didn't seem anything like what is portrayed on TV" (1).

### *Eric the Adolescent*

Eric and Dylan videotaped themselves on numerous occasions. Dylan seemed to be the cameraman most of the time. Therefore, Eric was the subject in numerous scenes. Visually, he seemed like a typical teenager. His hair was cut short. He wore jeans and T-shirts, like most of his peers. Again, like many of his peers, some of his T-shirts were bought at rock-and-roll concerts, such as the one he wore on the morning the boys videotaped themselves in the hallways of Columbine High School where they were accosted by other students, at least one whose sweatshirt suggests he was a member of the football team. This particular T-shirt was black and advertised one of Harris's and Klebold's favorite industrial rock bands, KMFDM. As is the custom, the back of the T-shirt listed the venues for the band's recent tour. In the videotapes, Eric gave every impression of being a normal teenager, talking about school, girls, and cars. His eyes were bright; he had an engaging smile. His facial expressions belied a quick intelligence. In his conversations, he engaged other students and interacted with them in a positive manner. Even after being pushed aside in the hallway by other students, he showed no particular anger. The incident seemed to be

forgotten soon after it occurred. The only indication that Eric Harris had a dark side was his KMFDM T-shirt.

Heavy metal music has its greatest popularity among suburban white males, as does rap (now hip-hop) (Berry 1994; Gaines 1993; Kotarba 1994; Weinstein 1994). Eric Harris was a great fan of German industrial music. His favorite bands were KMFDM and Rammstein. Industrial music is a subset of heavy metal and tends to be harsh, loud, and violent. It also has a techno quality to it that gives it movement and drive. The lyrics of the music express anger, violence, nihilism, and an apocalyptic vision. The title of one of KMFDM albums is "World War III." Other titles from KMFDM include "Megalomaniac," "Jihad," "Spit Sperm," "Bullets, Bombs, and Bigotry," and "Anarchy." Rammstein titles are in German.

Eric had taken some German in school but apparently was somewhat self-taught. His journals are interlaced with German phrases, and he was known for reciting Rammstein's German lyrics among people who knew him. Based upon his web site in which Adolf Hitler was adulated, Eric was apparently a Naziphile and planned the attack on Columbine to coincide with Hitler's birthday on April 20 in celebration of his "contributions to white culture" (Shepard 1999).

In the basement tapes, Eric Harris complained about moving to a new community every two or three years (Gibbs and Roche 1999). His school records (Shepard 1999) indicate that by the seventh grade, he had attended five schools. He was unhappy about attending a new school and starting at the bottom of the social structure each time, having to make new friends and being an outsider. Ironically, his arrival in Columbine meant the end of his career as an Air Force brat, moving from base to base every two or three years, having to jettison old friends and make new ones. In Columbine he had a new start in which his life would assume stability.

However, he arrived at Ken Caryl Middle School in the middle of the seventh grade. According to several informants, the peer group structure at Ken Caryl had pretty much solidified, with students associated with the Columbine Sports Association, which sponsored football, baseball, and soccer leagues, given elite status. Eric played sports along with Brooks Brown and other students in the YMCA League, a community-based sports league that had less status than the Columbine Sports Association. The Columbine Sports Association functioned as a conduit to Columbine High School sports teams. Members of the high school coaching staff were involved in the Association and oversaw the development of players in that league. For example, the Association sponsored Pop Warner style football leagues for various age groups from seven to seventeen years old. The Association provided training and experience for youngsters who

aspired to play on Columbine High School sports teams. The high school coaches knew and communicated with the Association coaches. By the time an Association athlete got to high school, he had been thoroughly evaluated and the high school coaching staff had a substantial idea of his capabilities.

Students participating in the less prestigious YMCA League, which deemphasized competition and focused on enjoying the game, according to students and parents whose children were in that league, tended to be overlooked when trying out for Columbine High School sports teams. Because, as noted in Chapter 4, the core of the Columbine elite is sports stars, competition for elite positions in the adolescent peer structure begins quite early. By the seventh grade, it is fairly well consolidated.

As a consequence, Eric gravitated toward the outcast students. His friends would be other students at the low end of the peer status structure, what Brooks Brown referred to as the “loser students,” such as Brooks, Nate Dykeman, Chris Morris, and, of course, Dylan Klebold.

Eric fit the masculine prototype: he was bright, athletic, and gave the appearance of self-assurance. According to people who knew him, he was a good soccer player and accounted for himself well on the baseball field. However, he had two disadvantages: first, he was below average in height, measuring about 5'8" in his senior year of high school. Second, he had a slight concavity of his chest, which gave the appearance of a pushed-in sternum. In the hyper-competitive world of adolescent peer groups, any difference or deviation from the norm invites ridicule. In actuality, in adolescent subcultures, those of low status are ridiculed and harassed by their upper status peers because they are of low status. Higher status peers find and latch on to any personal quirk, physical difference, or behavioral oddity. With Eric, it was his concave chest. This slight physical deformity had no apparent health or physical consequences related to athleticism. He was apparently agile enough and had enough body control to be invited to try out for the Columbine High School soccer team by the coach in the tenth grade. He declined the offer.

*“I’m full of hate and I love it”:  
The Mind of Eric Harris*

Soon after Eric Harris’s life assumed stability, he began to show signs of psychological problems. Eric was apparently a very bright and sensitive child. His Little League coach in Plattsburgh, New York, remembered him as a timid player who would not swing his bat for fear of striking out and letting his teammates

down (Bartels and Crowder 1999). What little evidence exists suggests that Eric Harris was highly sensitive about his status among his peers. He was keenly aware of what others thought about him.

It did not take long for Eric to figure out that although his family life was going to be stable, his peer status would be at the bottom of the heap. Because of his physical stature and his status as a newcomer in a peer structure organized around football heroes and their hangers-on in middle school, he did not stand much of a chance for wide social acceptance. He was new, he was shy, he did not belong to a church youth organization, and he was not a football player. He was on the outside of a peer structure that was well formed and had few doors of entry. He found himself at the bottom, yet again, through no fault of his own.

In addition to his low peer status, Eric was experiencing psychological problems. After his arrest for breaking into a van in the fall prior to the attack on Columbine, the court recommended that he receive psychological services. He was diagnosed by local psychologist with obsessive-compulsive disorder for which Luvox was prescribed (Bartels and Crowder 1999). However, that diagnosis was disputed by FBI profiler Supervisory Special Agent Dwayne Fuselier, the FBI's lead Columbine investigator and a clinical psychologist, who diagnosed Harris as a psychopath, which is a behavioral disorder. Dr. Frank Ochberg, a psychiatrist who helped the FBI profile Eric Dylan, told me he that he thought that the mental health professional who diagnosed Eric as obsessive-compulsive would be embarrassed by that diagnosis. Whether Eric was a psychopath or not will be discussed below; however, what interested parties, whether professional or lay, have indicated was that Eric, by the time he arrived at Columbine High School, was out of control. Given his writing, Eric was probably aware of his lack of psychological stability.

Although Eric's psychological problems remained largely undetected, clearly his behavior was disturbing to Randy and Judy Brown, the parents of Brooks Brown, who had a volatile and on-again, off-again relationship with Eric, which tended to be based upon how angry Eric was with them. The Browns filed two complaints against Eric with the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department, one in 1997 and the other the following year. In a personal conversation this researcher had with Judy Brown (March 1, 2004), she said that she had forgotten that she had filed a complaint in 1997 and was informed by the Department that they had recently uncovered the earlier complaint. The *Rocky Mountain News* reported the incident as follows:

In August 1997 and again in March 1998, Jefferson County sheriff's officials received allegations of criminal activity by teenagers Eric Harris and

Dylan Klebold, including charges that they had authored violent rants and a death threat on the Internet and were building pipe bombs and vandalizing property.

The 1997 report was apparently never followed up on, but the 1998 allegations sparked an investigation involving several deputies, one of whom drafted an affidavit to support a warrant to search Harris' home more than a year before he and Klebold opened fire at Columbine High School. But that warrant was never taken to a judge, and it was withheld from the public for nearly two years after the April 20, 1999, attack on the school (Vaughan 2004).

According to Brooks Brown, the precipitating incident for the complaint in March 1998 occurred when he was approached by Dylan in the hallway of Columbine High School. Dylan told Brooks to look at Eric's web site and handed him a paper with Eric's Web address (Brown and Merritt 2002). That evening, Brooks logged on to the web site and found the following:

I will rig up explosives all over town and detonate each one of them after I mow down a whole fucking area full of you snotty ass rich motherfucking high strung godlike attitude worthless pieces of shit whores [*sic*]. I don't care if I live or die in the shoot out, all I want to do is to kill and injure as many of you pricks as I can, especially a few people. Like Brooks Brown (Columbine Research Site 2003, 10, 417; an earlier part of the quote can be found on 189).

In addition, Eric had posted Brooks's phone number, a list of reasons why he hated Brooks, and a promise of a reward to the person who killed him. Brooks told his parents about the web site. They printed the pages, called the Sheriff's Department, and handed the pages over to a deputy. They also described to the deputy prior problems they had with Eric, the fact that Eric had been making pipe bombs, and his desire to kill people.

The discovery of the web site by Brooks Brown occurred a full year prior to the shootings. Clearly, at this time, Eric was already seething with hatred and homicidal thoughts. It was about this time that he started compiling his "S-hit List," which contained the names of fellow students who had slighted him in some way. Police interviews with list members indicated that some indicated that they barely knew Eric and could not explain why he had a grudge against them; other males on the list indicated that they may have had a confrontation with him. The female students on the list were almost exclusively girls that Eric had

asked out on a date and who had refused him (Columbine Research Site 2003, 10,276–10,296). Eric had special enmity for girls who would string him along before refusing.

Eric's rage was all-consuming. His web site ended with the following warning:

I live in Denver and I would love to kill all its residents. Well all you people out there can just kiss my ass and die. From now on, I don't give a fuck what almost any of you mutha fuckas have to say, unless I respect you which is highly unlikely, but for those of you who happen to know me and know that I respect you, may peace be with you and don't be in my line of fire. For the rest of you, you all better fucking hide in your house because I'm comin' for EVERYONE soon, and I WILL be armed to the fuckin teeth and I WILL shoot and kill and I WILL fucking KILL EVERYTHING! No I am not crazy, crazy is just a word, to me it has no meaning, everyone is different, but most of you fuckheads out there in society, going to your everyday fucking jobs and doing your everyday routine shitty things, I say fuck you and die. You got a problem with my thoughts, come tell me and I'll kill you, because ... god damn it, DEAD PEOPLE DON'T ARGUE! (Brown and Merritt 2002, 86–87, emphasis in original).

Eric's written rants were accompanied by an eerie behavioral coolness. Other students did not perceive Eric's anger. Although judging by the comments made by girls on his hit list to police officers, they sensed something unnerving about him when they were in his presence. Upon completion of an interview with one girl on his list, the officer wrote, "There was just something about him she didn't like, she didn't know what it was, but he seemed a little evil" (Columbine Research Site 2003, 10,280). Another girl stated that he was not her type, that he was "nice, but weird" (Columbine Research Site, 2003, 10,277). The girls were wary of Eric, but did not know exactly why. They intuited something dark and deep. On his web site, Eric stated that he was kind of a goth and was "dark"; despite his ranting and his overwhelming hatred, he was able to keep that dark side hidden from other people with the exception of the Browns and Dylan Klebold, although in the last semester of his senior year, more people became aware of his negativity.

In the videotapes that Eric and Dylan made for classroom projects, Eric appears decidedly normal. He is clear eyed, relaxed, seemingly open, and, well, a typical teenage boy. In school, he was not a troublemaker. He was a bright student who was quite articulate. He apparently did not cause trouble in the



classrooms. Both publicly and in an interview with this researcher, Principal DeAngelis claimed that he had no interactions with Eric and did not know him (Scanlon 1999). In a school of 1800 students, Eric did not stand out. Dylan's videotape of his own harassment, described in Chapter 5, barely fazed Eric. The boy in the videotape seems to have no relationship to the boy who spewed out his hate on his web site.

That is not to mean that Eric did not allow his dark side free play. In his midnight missions, he vandalized homes of people he did not like and then wrote about his exploits on his web site. He made pipe bombs and exploded them. He illegally bought semiautomatic rifles; he also illegally sawed off the ends of shotguns. He and Dylan broke into a van and stole its contents. He played first-person killer games, *Doom*, and *Quake*, for hours on end. He devised levels in *Doom* in which the protagonist was overwhelmed by the enemy, leading other *Doom* players to complain that he gave them no chance to defeat them (Prennergast 1999). And, of course, he planned the destruction of his high school.

On the one hand, he covered up his dark side very well; on the other hand, he was foolhardy and lucky that he was not discovered. He was quite stealthy in hiding his activities. In the basement tapes, he provided a tour of his bedroom, showing where his weaponry and his pipe bombs were hidden (Gibbs and Roche 1999). He and Dylan were able to keep their plans concealed from their closest associates. There is some justification for accusations of the Harris's turning a blind eye to Eric's nefarious activities. Eric's father, Wayne, picked up the telephone, and on the other end was a gun shop owner who said that the ammunition that was ordered was ready to be picked up. Mr. Harris just said that he had not ordered any ammunition and hung up. No questions were asked about who ordered the ammunition or whether the clerk had dialed the correct number.

Eric documented his midnight exploits on his web site, which was a public venue that anybody could have accessed. He also vented his anger, hate, homophobia, racism, pet peeves, and plans for the destruction of Columbine High School on his web site. He took a pipe bomb to work when he was employed by Blackjack Pizza and showed it around (Johnson 1999). As early as 1997, he was talking about collecting bombs and blowing up the school in the very cafeteria in which he and Dylan dragged two twenty-pound propane tanks on April 19, 1999 (Vaughan, Washington, and Carnahan 1999):

“Every once in a while, Eric would talk about blowing up the school—but we all talked about blowing up the school, or ‘going postal’ and shooting someone you’re mad at,” said Justin Preziodi, 20, who graduated from

Columbine in 1997. “But you would never think someone would actually do it.”... Harris’ obsession with explosives was a frequent topic of his conversations with fellow students.

In chapter 5, several students admitted to fantasizing about blowing up Columbine High School. It was a fairly common fantasy, especially among out-cast students for whom attendance at Columbine seemed to be an invitation to harassment, humiliation, and abuse. Given that nobody had ever bombed their high school before, such talk was dismissed as fantasy.

Eric Harris had sensibilities that are rarely seen in an eighteen-year-old. First, he was extremely well-accomplished in the design of computer games, especially his favorite, *Doom*. Prendergast (1999) described his skill this way:

You master *Doom* and its even more violent successor, *Doom 2*. You engage in “deathmatch” versions of the game involving two or more players, vying on a single computer or over the Internet. It isn’t enough.

You spend long hours in your room designing new levels to the game, called wads, and posting them online for other fanatics to play. You alter the noises that the weapons make, the screams of your victims [NB: like having his victims cry out “Lord, why is this happening to me?”]. Eventually you will design fields of combat that resemble your neighborhood—and, it’s rumored, your school.

It’s still not enough. You hunger for recognition. You slap a plea on the side of a building in one of the wads, urging players to send comments to your e-mail address. “This one took a damn long time to do,” you write in the text file attached to another wad, “so send me some bloody credit, man!”

By the middle of your sophomore year, you’ve completed your most sophisticated wad yet, a tricky, brutal, two-level shootout that’s many times the size of your previous efforts. It climaxes in an orgy of killing, the screen flooded with hundreds of demons. The player has only two options: engage in a tedious, mechanical ritual of slaughter, or end things quickly by using a cheat command to go into “God mode,” in which the player is invincible.

Prendergast points out Eric Harris’s desperate need for recognition. He had an inflated sense of himself as a person to be reckoned with but who was ignored

by his audience and brutalized by his more physically endowed peers. He felt unappreciated. What he could not achieve in life, he achieved in death. Alive, he was just another miserable square peg in the world of round holes. Only through death would he gain notoriety.

Second, he was able to plan and execute the most destructive act against an educational institution in the history of United States. Although Dylan was his trusty sidekick, Eric was the planner. Eric was the one who actually went into the cafeteria and conducted an analysis of when it was most populated. The boys planted two diversionary bombs to explode a few minutes before their assault on the school. They kept their plans hidden from their families and closest friends for over a year. They even booby-trapped their cars so that they would explode when students ran into the parking lot. They bought weaponry, made bombs, and stashed them in preparation for the assault. For eighteen-year-olds, this is pretty sophisticated planning.

Third, Eric wrote voluminously. He paraphrased Shakespeare's "Good wombs have born bad sons," from *The Tempest*, as an entry in his 1999 journal for Mother's Day (Shepard 1999). Most of his writings are rants, such as several pages describing his pet peeves and hates. At other times, he wrote his opinions about various aspects of his life, listed under such categories as "philosophy," "America," and "society." Other writing included notes to himself, to-do lists, and descriptions of his so-called midnight missions in which he vandalized houses in the area. Much of his writing was cited earlier.

Eric's writings, suffused as they are with anger, hate, and desires to kill, are laced with humor, social criticism, double (or hidden) meanings, and intentional contradictions. The humor is a mix of typical adolescent humor and Eric's own sardonic sense of what is funny. An example of the former comes from his web site on a page titled, "Jo Mamma," which is a white kids version of African American verbal insults known as, "the dozens" (Abrahams 1962). The dozens is a verbal sparring game of insults oftentimes about one's mother, which usually begins, "Yo momma. ..." According to Brooks Brown (Brown and Merritt 2002), friends would sit around and tell Jo Mamma jokes. The intention was to make them deliberately insipid. Eric compiled about seventy-five such jokes on his web site (Shepard 1999). They are deliberately silly:

JO mamma has so many bag clips her neighbors ask to use some occasionally!

JO mamma has so much salad every day that she buys salad at Sam's Club and saves her money! (from Harris's defunct website).

Of greater interest is what Eric thinks is funny. It provides insight into Eric's mind. Some examples come from Eric's "DO YOU KNOW WHAT I HATE!!!?" rant:

DO YOU KNOW WHAT I LOVE!!!!?

—When some rich ass stuck up piece of shit white trash person gets in a car wreck with their brand new car!

DO YOU KNOW WHAT I LOVE!!!!?

—when some stupid ass kid blows his fucking handoff [*sic*] because he couldn't figure out that the lit fuse means that the firecracker is going to go off soon! HAHAAHA... "DUMBASS." (Columbine Research Site 2003, JC-001-010424).

The first entry is a reference to Rocky Hoffschneider, whose parents apparently bought him a Dodge Viper, which he totaled within days of receiving it. The second reference is apparently to a news item. In both cases, Eric is engaging in *schadenfreude*, gleefully enjoying the misfortunes of others. In the first case, he is elated at the fact that one of his tormentors gets his comeuppance. In the second case, Eric is gloating over the stupidity of some kid playing with firecrackers, whose misfortune it is to lose a hand. Throughout his writings, Eric is disdainful of people who are "stupid." For example:

DO YOU KNOW WHAT I HATE!!!?"

—STUPID PEOPLE!!! Why must so many people be so stupid!!!?

DO YOU KNOW WHAT I LOVE!!!!?"

—Making fun of stupid people doing stupid things! Like one time when I was watching this freshman to try to get on a computer that needed a password. ... He typed in the password and waited. The retard didn't press enter or anything. He just waited. Then he started cussing at the computer saying it was screwed up. Then the freshman went and got a teacher and the fucking teacher could not figure out why it wasn't going anywhere!!! Jesus!!! Personally, I think they should be shot. (Columbine Research Site 2003, JC-001-010424).

Throughout this rant, in which he outlines pet peeves ranging from people who drive slowly in the left lane, Star Wars fans, telephone solicitors for charities, people who don't believe in personal hygiene, people who overuse or mispronounce words, slow walkers, television commercials, country music, R-rated movies on cable, liars, braggarts, young smokers, and people who cut in line. In

a Dante-like quality, Eric metes out imaginary punishments. For stupid people, in an earlier version of his web site, he suggested they should be “smacked across the face a couple million times or so ... give or take 1” (Columbine Research Site 2003, JC-001-010411). For people who think professional wrestling is real, he suggests bombing their house and breaking their arms. For racists, he suggests that he will come in and break their legs with a plastic spoon, not caring how long it takes. Slow drivers should be sent to every driving class every day for a year. People who are mean to animals should be severely hurt.

One of the ideas that Eric Harris gets caught up in is natural selection, which in his mind evolved into social Darwinism. During the assault on Columbine, he wore a shirt that had “Natural Selection” emblazoned across the front. By natural selection, it is quite obvious that Eric understands it as the survival of the fittest in a social Darwinian sense. In his web site rant, he stated:

YOU KNOW WHAT I LOVE!!!!?

—Natural SELECTION!!!!!!!!!! God damn it’s the best thing that ever happened to the earth. Getting rid of all the stupid and weak organisms ... but it’s all natural!!! YES! I wish the government would just take off every warning label so that all the dumbasses would severely hurt themselves or DIE! And boom, no more dumbasses. Heh. (Columbine Research Site 2003, JC-001-10411).

Eric’s belief in natural selection as a mechanism for removing weak and stupid people from the face of the earth is ironic. Whether the irony is intentional or not, given the fact that Eric is homicidal and suicidal, is unknown. However, much of Eric’s writing is suffused with irony. Take for example his moniker, “Reb,” short for rebel. On an AOL site, he had several profiles over time, all with screen names that began with REB: REBDOOMER, Reblomakr, and REB DoMiNe. The mascot of Columbine High was the Rebels. In his writings, he calls his peers “trendy punk little smart asses,” “self-centered, selfish, lazy, impatient, rude, and ... damn, I’ve run out of adjectives,” and slaves to trends (Columbine Research Site 2003, JC-001-10411). Eric sees himself as a rebel against the Rebels, who are not rebels at all, but unthinking conformists.

Eric’s sense of irony leads him to generate numerous cryptic references. Obviously, some of these references escape this writer. However, in reading over the available materials, I discovered the following:

In his profile under the screen name, REBDOOMER, for location, he entered Littleton, CO USA. *Nil sine numine* (Shepard 1999). The Latin translates as “Nothing without Providence,” which is the Colorado State motto. Under

hobbies, he entered, “Semper Fidelis” (“always faithful”), the motto of the United States Marines. Eric wanted to join the Marines upon graduation from high school, but was rejected for mental health reasons. For his personal quote, he wrote, “Si vis pacem, para bellum,” or “if you want peace, prepare for war.” This last quote seems to conform to Eric’s Hobbsian view of nature and human relationships as an anarchic struggle of all against all, and Eric’s view that the predators are the big winners in the struggle for survival. His desire to become a Marine apparently would have been the actualization of his desire to become a predator.

Of greatest interest to this investigator is apparently his last screen name, “REB DoMiNe.” I do not know why the “m” and “n” in “Domine” are capitalized. However, “Domine” is Latin for “God,” and Eric combined “REB” with God. The rebel God is, of course, Satan. In their writings, there is little evidence of the boys being Satanists. However, in some of Eric’s drawings are images that could be interpreted as Satanic. These images were posted on the Trenchcoat Mafia web site. Eric viewed himself as a goth and considered himself “dark” (Shepard 1999). One would expect that in a predominantly Christian community that dissidence would cloak itself in Satanism. This was the case in Columbine, but it seemed to be primarily a practice among disaffected female students (Prendergast 1999).

In the profile for REB DoMiNe, Eric’s personal quote was, “It’s fun being a schizophrenic” (Shepard 1999). This cryptic entry seems to signify two things: first, Eric seems to view himself as a schizophrenic in the subjective sense R. D. Laing (1999) described in *The Divided Self*, in that his “inner self” is hidden from view and is divorced from his public persona. His writing seems to be venting from his hidden dark side. His description of himself as a schizophrenic suggests his awareness that he was living a double life; that he inhabited a persona that hid his “true self.” He seemed to understand that his “true self” was dark, evil, and abhorrent. Even though he was successful for the most part in keeping his dark side hidden from adult authorities and from many of his peers, his lack of success with girls seemed to stem from their sensing the violence seething within. Second, it suggests that Eric viewed his social interactions as inauthentic and part of a façade. Third, it suggests that Eric, at some level of understanding, knew there was something desperately wrong inside. He had been diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder and was taking Luvox. He admitted to self-medicating on cough medicine on his Trenchcoat Mafia web site. On the one hand, he seemed to revel in his anger and hatred; on the other hand, he wanted to destroy himself. However, if he was going to destroy himself, he was going to do it in a way that would send the world a message.

Those who knew Eric with any level of intimacy were aware of his volatility. The Brown family, who knew him fairly well through his relationship with Brooks, had experienced his violence. When they read the threats to Brooks's life, they did not think that it was merely verbal venting; they feared that he was capable of homicide. Eric's moods were mercurial. When Brooks encountered Eric in the parking lot of Columbine High School on that fateful day of April 20, 1999, Eric could have just as well pulled a gun and shot Brooks rather than warn him off.

The schizophrenic metaphor applies to the many contradictions in Eric's life: a cool persona covering roiling anger and hatred, on-campus wimp with a computer identity as a tough guy, victim and homicidal maniac, and good kid versus incorrigible villain. Eric was overwhelmed with hatred. The expression of that hatred was what gave him pleasure. In his journal he noted,

HATE! *I'm full of hate and I love it.* I hate people and they better fucking fear me if they know what's good for them. Yes I hate and I guess I want others to know it. ... (Harris 1998, emphasis mine).

Eric, with his feelings of grandiosity, had come to perceive himself as an avenging angel sworn not so much to right the wrongs of humanity but to terrorize lesser humans and demonstrate his own superiority. He perceived himself as devalued and unappreciated by others and hated them for that.

Perhaps the most chilling evidence of how engulfed Eric was in his hatred was revealed in a diary entry dated November 17, 1998, five months before the assault on Columbine (Harris 1998):

[What I] want is [to] be surrounded by the flesh of a woman, someone like [name blacked out] who I wanted to just fuck like hell, she made me practically come when she wore those shorts to work— instant hard on. I couldn't stop staring at her and others like [names blacked out], and others who I want to overpower and engulf myself in them. Mmmm. I can taste the sweet flesh now—the salty sweet, the animalistic movement. *Iccchhh liebe fleiscchhhhh.* ... Who can I trick into my room first? I can sweep someone off their feet, tell them what they want to hear, be all nice and sweet, and then “fuck ‘em like an animal, feel them from the inside” as Reznor [NB: an apparent reference to Trent Reznor, vocalist for the rock group Nine Inch Nails] said. Oh—that's something else, that one. [Describes a video where] a guy is kidnapped and tortured like hell—total hell. I want to do that, too. I want to tear a throat out with

my own teeth like a pop can. I want to gut somebody with my hands, to tear a head off and rip out the heart and lungs from the neck, to stab someone in the gut, shove it up to the heart, and yank the fucking blade out of their rib cage! I want to grab some weak freshman and just to tear them apart like a fucking wolf. Show them who is God, strangle them, squish their head, bite their temples into the skull, rip off their jaw. Rip off their collar bones, break their arms in half and twist them around, the lovely sounds of bones cracking and flesh ripping, ahh... so much to do and so little chances [*sic*].

Eric begins with a sexual fantasy, naming girls to whom he was attracted. He begins with the desire to touch, to feel the flesh of a woman. However, the sexual fantasy changes into reverie of rape, torture, and savagery. In this journal entry, the sexual merges into the homicidal. Even in the sexual fantasy, power plays an important part. No sense of mutuality exists; the other is victimized. The sexual act is construed as tricking and overpowering. As long as Eric is fantasizing about his ability to overpower someone else, he might as well do what he really wants, and that is to maim, torture, and kill. Eric Harris had a monster inside of him that wanted to be let out. That's what happened on April 20, 1999.

One subtext of all of Eric's writing is about power: the power to influence, the power to punish, the power to determine life and death, the power to control the world. Eric's adulation of Adolf Hitler seems to derive from Hitler's ability to exterminate anyone who did not conform to his image of the world. Repeatedly, Eric fantasizes about killing anyone who causes him the slightest inconvenience, people who are snobs, or just anyone: "[We] will hijack a hell of a lot of bombs and crash a plane into NYC with us inside firing away as we go down. Just something to cause more devastation" (Harris 1998). In that same journal entry Eric states, "I want to leave a lasting impression on the world."

Eric's friends, such as Brooks Brown, stated that Eric had a very strong sense of justice. That sense was violated on a daily basis, which increased his anger and frustration. However, Eric's writings betray a disdain for justice. He was too obsessed with power to be concerned about justice. His rant that anybody who disagreed with him should be killed contravenes the notion of any concept of distributive justice. What Eric was concerned about was lack of justice for himself and not for others. In light of his subsequent behavior of randomly killing convenient targets and his megalomaniacal notion that he was somehow superior by dint of an elevated state of consciousness and, therefore, could arbitrarily make decisions about who lived and who died, it can hardly be claimed that



he had a highly developed sense of justice. What he did have was a very strong sense of his own victimization.

A second subtext is Eric's need for recognition. Eric wanted to be a somebody. Alas, in the life of material reality, he was a nobody. Although he was bright and had a critical vision, those virtues were pretty far down the list of attributes admired by his peers, and it was peer recognition that Eric desperately desired. He wanted to be a person to be reckoned with; the last thing he wanted to be was a low status outcast who was not worthy of being taken seriously. He was going to be taken seriously if, quite literally, it was the last thing he did. Eric Harris, the unappreciated short kid at the bottom of the Columbine High School peer structure reconstituted himself as a Superman. In his journal, he rhetorically asked what made him and Dylan Klebold different from other people. He answered his own question:

Because I have something only me and V [NB: his nickname for Klebold, derived from Dylan's screen name "VoDKa"] have, SELF-AWARENESS, call it exoctenstiolum [existentialism] or what ever the fuck u want. We know what we are to this world and what everyone else is we learn more than what caused the Civil War and how to simplify quadratics in school we have been watching you people we know what you think and how you act [*sic*] (Harris 1998).

In the basement tapes, Dylan repeated what Eric had earlier written when he claimed that they were godlike because they had self-awareness. But from where did this self-awareness come? It apparently derived from a consciousness generated by their positions as despised members at the bottom of the social structure. Unlike other students who had a vested interest in the peer structure and who accepted it uncritically, Eric and Dylan, who were oppressed by it, viewed it critically. They viewed themselves as having a special consciousness that rejected conventional interpretations of reality and substituted their own opposition ideology. They were observing, taking notes, and planning revenge. Together, they were a force to be reckoned with.

## DYLAN KLEBOLD, WILLING FOLLOWER

In many ways, Dylan Klebold is more difficult to understand than Eric Harris. Eric vented his hatred through his writings. Because of the intensity of his hatred, writing constituted a release for Eric; it was as if he was compelled to write.

Dylan was outwardly shy and reserved. Although he kept a journal, he did not write nearly as much as Eric. Therefore, it is more difficult to get a sense of Dylan's consciousness. Because Eric was the "theorist" and wrote treatises, one does not know the scope of Dylan's input into the process. What evidence that does exist seems to indicate that Eric did the conceptualizing and Dylan accepted it as his own.

### *Dylan, the Early Years*

Dylan was born on September 11, 1981, in Englewood, Colorado, the second son of Tom and Sue Klebold. His brother, Byron, was three years older than Dylan. His entire life was spent as a resident of Southern Jefferson County. His parents, however, were both from Ohio. They met when they were students at Ohio State University, married, and moved to Southern Jefferson County where they put down roots and started a family.

It was a mixed marriage; Tom came from a Protestant background and Sue came from a wealthy, prestigious Jewish family. She was the granddaughter of Leo Yassinoff, a construction magnate and philanthropist in Columbus (Shepard 1999). His philanthropic works included a foundation that provided grants to educational institutions and social organizations and a Jewish community center in Columbus that bears his name. She was raised as a Jew; however, after marrying a Protestant, she led a mostly secular existence, and the family celebrated major Jewish and Christian holidays together (Culver 1999). However, an interviewee suggested that Tom Klebold was not particularly happy about celebrating Jewish holidays, but Sue insisted.

Religion was a problem for the Klebolds. Apparently, Tom Klebold had problems with organized religion. Reverend Marxhausen said that the Klebolds had attended services at St. Philip Lutheran Church for a few months five or six years before the shooting, but they stopped attending. They apparently never dealt with the issue of Judaism, other than celebrating Passover and Hanukah, two religious holidays that could be celebrated at home. They did not belong to a temple, and they apparently did not celebrate High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

The Klebold family, according to confidential sources, was not a particularly happy one. Dylan and his older brother fought continuously. Relationships within the family were not particularly nurturing. This does not mean that the parents were not caring; they were. Tom Klebold, who worked at home, said that he treasured the afternoons when Dylan would come home from school early and spend time with him. In the wake of the shootings, Kate Battan, the chief investigator

of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department, stated, "I sat down and I've spent a lot of time with the Klebolds, and they're nice people. It's not like they're these monsters that raised a monster" (Cullen 1999b).

However, Sue and Tom were not particularly demonstrative, nor were relationships with their children characterized by warmth or touching. Although relationships were filled with conflict, they were not physically violent. Tom and Sue Klebold attempted to raise their children with a strong sense of morality and adhesion to personal values. Both boys knew right from wrong. However, there was not much joy in the house.

In a strange way, Dylan tended to be isolated from other kids. The Klebold's house was in a canyon, and there were not many neighbors in the vicinity. Therefore, as a young child, when Dylan wanted to play with another peer, he was dependent upon a parent to take him to a play date. He attended first and second grades at Normandy Elementary School. In the third grade, Dylan passed the CHIPS (Challenging High Intellectual Potential Students) entrance examination and was entered into the program for gifted and talented children. The program was separated from regular students. This tended to limit the number of peers from which Dylan could choose friends.

Based upon interviews with adults and peers who knew Dylan, he was described consistently as insecure, shy, and immature. Although he had friends, such as Brooks Brown, and he participated actively in sports leagues sponsored by the recreation department in tee-ball, baseball, and soccer, he had trouble making friends. When he moved from the relative security of elementary school into middle school, there was a shakedown in the peer group as children from several elementary schools were collected into a single middle school. A new peer elite emerged. Dylan, because he was shy and immature, experienced adjustment problems. As mentioned earlier, the prime source for the stratification of the peer group in Ken Caryl Middle School was whether or not a child participated in the Columbine Sports Association. Dylan did not. Given that he was structurally underprivileged by virtue of his playing sports in the recreation league and he was devoid of the requisite social skills for upper mobility in the peer structure, Dylan found himself near the bottom of the newly evolving peer hierarchy.

Dylan apparently met and became friends with Eric Harris at Ken Caryl Middle School in the seventh or eighth grade. Because Eric was new to the area and was forced to enter a peer structure that had already crystallized, he had to pick his friends from those among whom he had access. Although Eric and Dylan were decent athletes, they did not have the quality of athletic prowess that would gain them entry into the elite group. Because of Eric's alien status and Dylan's

apparent lack of social skills, it was a friendship that was made at the bottom of the peer structure of Ken Caryl Middle School.

### *Identity Problems*

Dylan had identity problems. He came from a mixed marriage, in which the Jewish part was only begrudgingly acknowledged. Although his mother did not deny her Judaism and celebrated major Jewish holidays in the home, Dylan's Jewish background was not easily acknowledged. Evidence from the basement tapes indicate that not only did Dylan's best friend idolize Adolf Hitler specifically because of his final solution to exterminate the Jews, but Dylan apparently hid his Jewish background from his closest friend until he accidentally revealed it while making the basement tapes in the weeks before the shooting. In one of the basement tapes while the boys were declaiming religion, Dylan exclaimed that his parents were going to a "fucking" seder, which took Eric by surprise. Eric then asked Dylan if he was Jewish, to which Dylan shamefacedly responded, "Yes." Eric responded, "I'm sorry, man" (Jefferson County Sheriff's Office 1999, 10,374).

It is likely that Dylan experienced a fair amount of identity confusion. Was he a Jew, a Protestant, or neither? Clearly, he did not identify himself as a Jew or associate with Jewish kids, who were rare in southern Jefferson County. Until his revelation to Eric on the eve of the shootings, no one in Columbine High School, with the possible exception of Brooks Brown, knew Dylan had a Jewish background.

Was he ashamed of his background, or did he hide it because its revelation would have provided more ammunition to his tormentors? In Columbine, racism and anti-Semitism are muted to the point that the adults can deny their existence. As noted earlier, adults in southern Jefferson County regard themselves as tolerant of religious, racial, and ethnic differences. However, it is easy to maintain such a collective image in a community that is overwhelmingly white, Christian, and upper-middle-class. In Columbine, racism and anti-Semitism exist as unspoken assumptions that underlie the ethnocentrism of the community.

However, younger, less socialized members of the community have tended to be more vocal and outspoken about their biases. For example, Wayne and Kathy Harris were not only unaware of their son's racism and anti-Semitism, but when the racist and anti-Semitic content of the Trenchcoat Mafia web site was revealed, Mr. Harris responded by saying that he did not know where his son got that "Nazi stuff" (Culver 1999).

During the rampage, Dylan unabashedly called Isaiah Sholes a "nigger" and singled him out for death. Dylan, apparently imitating Eric, would shout "Heil

Hitler” in bowling class when he rolled a strike (Culver 1999). A Jewish kid, even one who is “half Jewish,” whose closest friend is an anti-Semitic Naziophile, who shouts “Heil Hitler” when he bowls a strike, who modifies the word “seder” with “fucking” and identifies himself in an Internet chat room as an admirer of Adolf Hitler, seems to have internalized hatred of Jews. Dylan seems to have adopted Eric’s reality system as his own.

In addition, Dylan may have been confused about his sexual identity. Dylan presented himself as a bisexual in an online chat room (Columbine Research Site 2003). Given the homophobic nature of American male culture (Kimmel 1996), even in the anonymity of Internet chat rooms, it would be extremely rare for a heterosexual male to claim bisexuality if there was no question about his sexual identity. There is no evidence that Dylan was sexually active; however, this may have actually added to his confusion.

So who was Dylan Klebold? At Columbine High School, he was a cipher. In the early reports following the shootings, he was identified as a member of the Trenchcoat Mafia. Trenchcoat Mafia members knew him as a friend of a member, not one of their own. He and Eric were primarily identified by other students by their social position at the bottom of the student hierarchy. They were viewed alternatively as dark, or Gothic, and as such, mildly threatening, or as ridiculous posers who were, in the words of IG, “a joke.” Whereas, girls may have found Eric “cute,” that term was not used to describe Dylan.

A former teacher described him as unattractive to his peers. The bright shy normal ninth grader, according to this teacher, changed into what the teacher clearly saw as a repugnant character. He had become a slacker, unmotivated to learn, trying to get by with as little work as possible. Not only was Dylan Klebold unlikable to the teacher, the teacher perceived him as rejected by his peers. Dylan had changed from being a nobody to one who was recognized for his negativity.

Out of the detritus of his life, with the help of Eric Harris, Dylan began to construct an identity as a badass outlaw. His anger and his hatred were used as the basis of a constructed identity. In videotapes he made with his friends, he played the role of enforcer, threatening, beating, and killing various and sundry enemies, especially bullies and preppies. In a paper that he wrote in English class, it is clear that he is both witness and protagonist:

What was most recognized about the man was the sound of his footsteps. Behind the conversations [and] noises of the town, not a sound was to be heard from him, except the dark, monotonous footsteps combined with the jingling of his belt chains striking not only the two visible guns, in their holsters, but the large Bowie knife, slung in anticipation of use. ...

This man walked, fueled by some untold purpose, what Christians would call evil. ... He stood about 6 feet and 4 inches, and was strongly built. His face was entirely in shadow, yet even though I was unable to see his expressions, I could feel his anger, cutting thru [*sic*] the air like a razor. He seemed to know where he was walking, and he noticed my presence, but paid no attention, as he kept walking toward a popular bar, The Watering Hole. He stopped about 30 feet from the door, and waited. "For whom?" I wondered, as I saw them step out. He must've known their habits well, as they appeared less than a minute after he stopped walking. A group of college-preps, about nine of them, stopped in their tracks. ... The street light illuminating the bar [and] the sidewalk showed me a clear view of their stare, full of paralysis [and] fear. They knew who he was, [and] why he was there. (Jefferson County Sheriff's Office 1999C-001-016016).

"The Man," who had apparently been confronted earlier by the preppies and had been challenged to a fight, coolly dispatched the nine preppies, using handguns, a knife, and a metal truncheon. The slaying is explained in graphic detail with the preppies alternatively manifesting fear, denial of culpability, and bravado before getting their just deserts. Just before executing his last victim, who was seriously wounded, "the man" set off two remote diversionary explosions, foreshadowing the boys' attempt to do the same during the Columbine shootings. The story ended,

The town was utterly still, except for the wail of police sirens. The man picked up the bag and his clips, and proceeded to walk back the way he came. I was still, as he came my way again. He stopped, and gave me a look I will never forget. If I could face an emotion of God, it would have looked like the man. I not only saw his face, but also felt emanating from him power, complacency, closure, and godliness. The man smiled, and in that instant, thru [*sic*] no endeavor of my own, I understood his actions. (Jefferson County Sheriff's Office 1999, JC-001-016017).

"The man" can be viewed as Dylan Klebold's ego ideal: two inches taller than he, muscular, smart, self-assured, resolute, in control, and coldly murderous. "The man" was, quite literally, an avenging angel. For a child raised in a predominantly secular household, the story has numerous religious references. The man is both evil and godly. In the story, the man laughs at one of the preppies' attempt at bravado. Klebold described the laugh as one that "would have

made Satan cringe in hell.” Klebold places himself in the story as the lone witness to the event. He is not horrified by the slaughter; rather, he is awed by the power and self-composure of the man.

Dylan Klebold’s writings and videotapes seem to be obsessively concerned with avenging wrongs. In the videotapes the boys made for class, they hired themselves out to avenge bullies. In another story written for his creative writing class, based upon this scenario of the Doom videogame, he portrayed himself as the last Marine alive to defend the earth from an alien invasion. In this particular story, the protagonist is overwhelmed by the death and destruction and becomes psychologically paralyzed.

In his senior year, Dylan wrote a twelve-page paper entitled “The Mind and Motives of Charles Manson,” which was not so much about the mind and motives of Manson as a description of the lethal activities of the Manson family drawn primarily from the work of Vincent Bugliosi (Bugliosi and Gentry 1974). Manson, who was idolized by the characters in Oliver Stone’s movie, “Natural Born Killers,” of which Klebold and Harris were enamored, was characterized by Bugliosi as a revenge killer. He was a serial killer who murdered people who crossed or slighted him. The killings of Sharon Tate and her friends and the LaBiancas in August of 1969 were supposed to set off a racial war between whites and blacks that would lead to social revolution; Harris and Klebold thought that their actions would start a revolution in which oppressed kids would rise up against bullies.

In the paper, Dylan wrote about Manson:

Helter Skelter, revenge was part of his beliefs. Humans had corrupted the Earth and ATWA [Air, Trees, Water, Animals], and were ignorant about it. Manson had felt that society dumped him and he felt great rage for society, and people, and later found an anthem for his rage. When asked about his actions, many years after the murders, he had said that he is part of everyone, that he mirrors people, because they shaped him. The Beatles’ *White Album* included songs (“Helter-Skelter,” “Revolution #9,” “Piggies,” and others) that Manson felt documented his rage toward society. (Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office 1999, JC-001016026-27).

Dylan’s fascination with Charles Manson was probably stimulated not only by the violence he perpetrated but also by his position as social outcast. The actions of Klebold and Harris were similar to those of Manson and his family in an earlier era. According to Bugliosi (1974), Charles Manson was literally raised by the State of California, alternating between foster care, institutionalized care, and the criminal justice system; he had a towering hatred for society. In a period

of a social movement among young people, he managed to legitimate that hate by incorporating movement interpretations of reality into a pseudo-theory he called “Helter-Skelter.” He thought that by engaging in high profile murders of celebrities, white society would blame blacks for the murders, instigating a war between the races that would eventuate in a revolution. However, by the time of the Tate-LaBianca murders, Manson had already killed several dozen victims.

Although the paper reads like a term paper based upon a single source, which it is, it betrays an affinity Dylan Klebold had with Charles Manson. He empathized with his outcast status, viewed his actions as an attack on an unjust society, and apparently adopted his theory that high profile violence would start a revolution, even though, in Manson’s case, it did not. Rather, it signaled the beginning of the end of the middle-class youth movement (Foss and Larkin 1976).

The man, the Marine from Doom, Charles Manson, the persona adopted in the basement tapes, and the fantasy role of avenger in the videotape made with Eric, all emphasize the desire to exact revenge for injustices. Dylan Klebold, in the world of his peers, was perceived by others as clumsy, oafish, unkempt, immature, and nerdish. He was subject to ostracism and harassment. He was less than a nobody. Many of his peers thought he was “an asshole.” The young man who was negatively perceived by others probably did not like himself. Being “half” Jewish did not help, and the revelation of his Jewish ancestry probably created more problems. Dylan Klebold was a jumble of psychological contradictions: Jew/Gentile, nerd/avenging hero, heterosexual/homosexual. In the flinty, competitive, gun-crazed, moralistically rigid environment of southern Jefferson County, these contradictions were transcended through violence.

## THE BOYS TOGETHER

In this section, I will attempt to answer the following questions: What attracted the boys to each other? What were the internal dynamics of the relationship? What did they do together?

Nobody was quite sure about how or when Eric and Dylan met (Bartels and Crowder 1999). The best guess is that they met and became friends sometime during the seventh or eighth grade. That friendship, made at the bottom of the peer structure of Ken Caryl Middle School, lasted until April 20, 1999.

In overwhelmingly white middle-class high schools, kids at the bottom of the social structure form a cultural opposition to the dominant elite (Eckert 1989). In part, outcast students are those who either cannot or will not conform to the



norms of the dominant elite. They may not have the physical attributes, athletic abilities, socioeconomic status, social skills, or interests required by the elites. On the other hand, their cultural sensibilities, musical tastes, intellectual capabilities, and world views also set them apart. However, as the peer structure solidifies, elites and outcasts define themselves dialectically such that what is associated with the other is anathema within the peer subculture. If the elite is homophobic, then the outcasts may engage in gender bending and flirt with homosexuality. If the elite dresses in Abercrombie and Fitch, outcasts will dress in black, adopt a Gothic image, and wear Doc Martens. If elites are highly Christianized, outcasts will dabble in Satanism and Wicca. While elites presume their dominance to be part of the natural order of things, outcast students are cynical about the nature of existing social arrangements. For some outcast students, pariah status can be a source of great psychological pain; for others, it becomes a badge of honor. For most, it is probably a combination. Humans are social animals and rejection is a blow to the self.

Eric and Dylan found themselves at the bottom of the peer structure for different reasons. Dylan did not fit in apparently because of insufficient social skills, lack of athletic prowess, and his own confusion about his identity. Eric's complaints about always having to start over at the bottom of the peer structure in each new community he lived in was visited upon him in Columbine even though this was going to be his permanent residence and there would be no more moving around as an Air Force brat. Had he arrived in southern Jefferson County a year or two earlier, things may have been different for him. Although, in many ways he was a "typical boy," he had neither the physical prowess nor interest in sports that would have elevated him in the peer structure. Unfortunately for him, he was short and slightly built, making him a target for bullies. His feelings of injustice were related to the fact that he never had a chance for acceptance given the structure of the peer group system.

In a school of 1,800 students, outcast students occupying a visible oppositional culture were estimated to be fewer than twenty, including the Trenchcoat Mafia. Although Dylan and Eric dressed in the oppositional mode and had friends who were TCM members, they were not themselves members. They tended to split themselves off from others, although they maintained relationships with other students such as Robyn Anderson, Mark Manes, Chris Morris, Cory Friesen, and Nick Baumgart. Chris Morris and Cory Friesen appeared in a picture of the Trenchcoat Mafia in the 1998 Columbine High School annual yearbook. Of the numerous students interviewed for this study, none who were in the middle of the peer group structure knew Eric Harris or Dylan Klebold. Some noted that

they had seen them around campus. Because they dressed similarly and had friends who were members of the TCM, many students mistakenly identified them as TCM members (Cullen 1999d).

Dylan was apparently attracted to Eric because he was open and personable. Eric was physically attractive, bright, and articulate. What was perhaps most attractive about Eric to Dylan was his sense of irony, strong sense of himself, and the fact that he could articulate a vision of reality that legitimated his own anger at and hatred for his social degradation. In addition, they shared interests in computer games. What apparently attracted Dylan to Eric was that Eric gave his life a spark that had not been there before. In many ways, Dylan worshiped Eric. Dylan began adopting Eric's ideas as his own even though they would be anathema to his parents' views. With Eric, he could swagger and cultivate a "badass" identity on the Internet under his moniker, "VoDKa." The relationship with Eric allowed him to fantasize himself as a person to be reckoned with.

For Eric, Dylan was a disciple. Dylan's acceptance of Eric's worldview tended to validate it. Long hours of playing Doom together reinforced their notion of themselves against the world. In the basement tapes, they claimed that they had arrived at a point of higher consciousness than mere mortals (Gibbs and Roche 1999). This idea was also reinforced through the Doom videogame, in which the lone Marine attempts to vanquish subhuman monsters in order to save the human race. Most likely, they saw themselves as the personification of the Marine in Doom and saw their predatory peers as the subhuman monsters that threatened the Marine.

Eric was obsessed with his anger, hatred, and feelings that he had been treated unjustly and that others did not appreciate his talents and qualities. Although physically attractive, girls initially attracted to Eric were put on guard by what they sensed as violent emotions beneath the surface. Dylan bought into those feelings and validated them. Eric's friendship with Dylan allowed him to express those feelings and have them reciprocated. Revenge for real and imagined slights propelled their relationship to the point of mass murder and mutual suicide.

Numerous writers, especially in chat rooms on the Internet, have speculated that the relationship between Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold was homoerotic. Writers have speculated about the sexual orientation of the boys on several occasions (Chase 2001; Cullen 2004). However, Eric's writings reveal him as heterosexual and homophobic. In his senior year, he maintained a relationship for a few weeks with a girl several years his senior who lived miles away from him. Logistics and age differences made the relationship difficult and eventually impossible to maintain. One should recall, too, that his sexual fantasy that

transformed into gore and violence began with his attraction to girls. In addition, in one of his rants, he stated:

YOU KNOW WHAT I HATE!!!!?

HOMOSEXUALS!! It is just plain WRONG. (Columbine Research Site 2003, JC-001-010414)

Even though Dylan had a date to the senior prom and Eric did not, no evidence exists indicating that Dylan had a romantic or sexual relationship with a girl. His date to the prom was his friend Robyn Anderson, with whom he had a platonic relationship. The evidence gathered seems to indicate that Dylan had not yet become sexually active; because of his lack of social skills and emotional immaturity, he was probably incapable of maintaining a sexual relationship. A reporter named Mike Connors told investigators that he had encountered Dylan Klebold in an Internet chat room. According to the police report, Klebold spoke at length with Connors about his relationship with Eric Harris and that he, Klebold, described himself as bisexual. It is possible that Dylan's feelings toward Eric may have been erotic. However, it is likely that any attempt to approach Eric sexually by Dylan would have threatened their relationship on which Dylan was highly dependent. Therefore, it is highly improbable that Eric and Dylan engaged in any homosexual behavior, and that any erotic feelings that Dylan may have felt toward Eric were kept to himself.

Several informants, including Frank Ochsberg, a psychiatrist at Michigan State University who helped the FBI develop psychological profiles on Klebold and Harris, suggested that without the other, neither boy could have carried out the attack alone; that they tended to reinforce each other; and that the presence of the other prevented them from backing out of their plans. Evidence from the boy's writings and the videotapes seems to indicate that once they committed themselves to their plan and began to collect weaponry and draw up a strategy, if there were thoughts about abandoning the plan, they were not expressed openly.

Clearly, each boy desperately needed the other. Eric gave Dylan's life momentum, purpose, and direction. Prior to his relationship with Eric, Dylan's life was drifting downward. He seemed not to know who he was or where he was going. Eric changed all that. Although Eric's life would be short, it would be significant, and he would die a celebrity. For Eric, Dylan was a willing accomplice and validated a worldview in which he was unjustly treated and victimized by his moral inferiors. Together, they were a force to be reckoned with. Separately, they were just a couple of nerds at the very bottom of the social structure of Columbine High School.

Together, Eric and Dylan constructed a reality parallel to conventional society in which they were heroic, like the Marine in the Doom videogame. In their alternative world, they were the arbiters of morality. They were like gods who would avenge themselves on their moral inferiors who were their social superiors and who defended that superiority by harassing and humiliating anybody, especially those who opposed or rejected the social order at Columbine High. Therefore, online they constructed their own identities as hard ass “natural born killers.” The contradiction between their social identities in the lived-in world of Columbine High School and those constructed on the Internet was resolved through the attack on their high school on April 20, 1999, and their subsequent suicides.

### THE DEPRESSIVE AND THE PSYCHOPATH?

In the wake of the Columbine massacre, the FBI convened a conference of mental health specialists and forensic psychologists in Leesburg, Virginia, for the purpose of developing psychological profiles of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold (Cullen 2004). Two of the attendees of this conference, psychiatrist Frank Ochberg and Special Agent Dwayne Fuselier, revealed the findings of that conference to free-lance journalist Dave Cullen, who had been writing numerous articles about the Columbine shootings. The apparent conclusions of the conference were that Dylan Klebold was “a depressive” and Eric Harris was “a psychopath.” According to Cullen, Dylan Klebold was easier to diagnose because he was a garden-variety depressed teenager:

Fuselier and Ochberg say that if you want to understand “the killers,” quit asking what drove *them*. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were radically different individuals, with vastly different motives and opposite mental conditions. Klebold is easier to comprehend, a more familiar type. He was hotheaded, but depressive and suicidal. He blamed himself for his problems.

Harris is the challenge. He was sweet-faced and well-spoken. Adults, and even some other kids, described him as “nice.” But Harris was cold, calculating, and homicidal. “Klebold was hurting inside while Harris wanted to hurt people,” Fuselier says. Harris was not merely a troubled kid, the psychiatrists say, he was a psychopath. (Cullen 2004).

Whether or not Dylan Klebold blamed himself for his problems is an open question. It may be that the profilers had data unavailable to others. However, the Klebolds were not interviewed by this researcher, although the lead investigator of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department, Kate Battan, spent considerable time with them, concluding that they were good, concerned parents. My interviews with Dylan's friends suggested that he did not blame himself for his problems, but blamed others, especially football players and bullies. According to Cullen, Ochberg, and Fusillier, Dylan internalized and Eric externalized their personal problems. The evidence from this study suggests that both externalized their problems.

Was Dylan Klebold depressed? A great deal of evidence exists to indicate that he was. Life at home was not particularly pleasant although his parents were certainly concerned and well-meaning. Life at Columbine High School was miserable and humiliating. He was struggling with several identity issues: Was he a Jew or a Naziophile? Was he gay or straight? Was he a nerd or a natural born killer? In each case, the contradictions were irresolvable. His Jewishness was a deep dark secret to be covered over by a public identity as a neo-Nazi. What ever homosexual urges he had were suppressed because their expression would destroy his relationship with Eric. He would avenge his nerd status on April 20, 1999. A Jew, a homosexual, a nerd: These aspects of his identity in deeply Christian, homophobic, red-blooded American southern Jefferson County had to be the source of tremendous fear, anxiety, and self-loathing for Dylan Klebold.

Was Eric Harris a psychopath? The terms "psychopath" and "sociopath" are not used by the psychological profession anymore. The term listed in the DSM-IV manual is "antisocial personality disorder" (AllPsych online 2004). The symptoms of antisocial personality disorder include difficulty with and hostility toward authority, illegal behavior, cruelty to animals, and pyromania. The psychological components are a depressed ability to feel empathy and the lack of remorse for wrongdoings. Psychopaths lie for sport; they obtain pleasure from deceiving others. According to Cullen (2004), "Harris'[s] pattern of grandiosity, glibness, contempt, lack of empathy, and superiority read like the bullet points on [psychologist Dr. Robert] Hare's (1999) Psychopathy Checklist and convinced Fuselier and the other leading psychiatrists close to the case that Harris was a psychopath."

In a personal communication with Dr. Ochberg, I was told that the prime evidence of Eric's psychopathology was his ability to use the language of emotion in a manipulative fashion. Ochberg's case was presented in the Cullen (2004) article:

Harris married his deceitfulness with a total lack of remorse or empathy—another distinctive quality of the psychopath. Fuselier was finally convinced of his diagnosis when he read Harris’[s] response to being punished after being caught breaking into a van. Klebold and Harris had avoided prosecution for the robbery by participating in a “diversion program” that involved counseling and community service. Both killers feigned regret to obtain an early release, but Harris had relished the opportunity to perform. He wrote an ingratiating letter to his victim offering empathy, rather than just apologies. Fuselier remembers that it was packed with statements like “Jeez, I understand now how you feel and I understand what this did to you.”

“But he wrote that strictly for effect,” Fuselier said. “That was complete manipulation. At almost the exact same time, he wrote down his real feelings in his journal”:

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

Both boys took pleasure in duping others and being able to hide their plot from their parents and friends. The diversion class was a charade. Yet it is clear from Eric’s response (Harris 1998), he understood the content of the program in great detail.

In my view, the evidence for Eric’s psychopathology is, at best, mixed. Could he be cold and calculating? Yes, he could be. However, he could also be volatile and violent in his interaction with others, such as the incident in which he threw a rock and cracked the windshield of Brooks Brown’s car. Paradoxically, although Eric took pleasure in duping adult authorities, he was also highly respectful of them, including his own father. In the windshield incident, Judy Brown confronted him. According to her observations, he was fearful of the reactions of his parents. He was remembered in Plattsburgh, New York, as shy and respectful. He never constituted a behavior problem in class; Principal DeAngelis did not know him because apparently there were never any problems with Eric in school, although one of the students interviewed (EK) indicated that her brother was bullied by Harris and Klebold, which was adjudicated by Mr. DeAngelis. He apparently forgot about the incident. At work at Blackjack Pizza, when

it was discovered the boys were exploding firecrackers and making ice bombs behind the store and their boss told them to stop it, Eric did so. In one of his final diary entries (Harris 1998), Eric stated, “[Just] because we went on a killing spree doesn’t mean everyone else will and hardly ever do people bring bombs or guns to school anyway, *the admin. is doing a fine job as it is*, I don’t know who will be left after we kill but damnit don’t change any policies just because of us” (Emphasis mine).

Yet this same administration that Eric is praising is the one that stands accused by many observers, including this writer, of tolerating the conditions that led to predatory behavior on the part of the jocks in the school that angered Eric. Clearly, Eric did not display empathy on April 20, 1999. But in talking with people who knew Eric, a quite different picture emerged: Eric had a pet dog that he loved and cared for. He was described as a good friend who could give emotional support to people he liked; he empathized with those like himself who were victimized by the jocks. I doubt whether the profilers talked to any of his friends.

Was Eric a psychopath? Was Dylan a depressive? Obviously, both boys manifested characteristics of these psychological categories. The problem with such characterizations, especially used by a nonprofessional such as Cullen, is that it tends to engulf the boy’s identities and reduce them to labels. Once the boys were labeled, then it became easy to engage in crude psychological reductionism. “Most Americans have reached one of two wrong conclusions about why they did it. The first conclusion is that the pair of supposed ‘Trenchcoat Mafia outcasts’ were taking revenge against the bullies who had made school miserable for them. The second conclusion is that the massacre was inexplicable: We can never understand what drove them to such horrific violence” (Cullen 2004).

Aside from the simplistic notions of causality, Cullen (2004), drawing on the information from FBI profilers, concluded that the shootings were the consequence of the psychological pathologies of Harris and Klebold. He decided that the shootings were a result of Klebold’s depression and Harris’s psychopathology. The problem with Cullen’s conclusion is that depression and psychopathology are insufficient factors in determining any given behavior. Depression can evince itself in any number of behaviors ranging from inability to get out of bed in the morning and function to homicide. Psychopathology can be present in any number of people, from clever and manipulative politicians and CEOs to serial killers. Environmental influences give direction to psychopathology. For Cullen to attribute the Columbine shootings to the psychological states of the killers is to deny environmental influences in the generation of those psychological states and tacitly to absolve others of any culpability. It is the equivalent of Columbine High School Principal Frank DeAngelis attributing the killings to the fact that the boys

were “evil.” It is a case of labeling and throwing away the label. Nothing is explained; however, it gives the labeler a false sense of certainty of a *deus ex machina*, or more precisely, *diabolus ex machina* explanation.

In this chapter, I have reconstructed the mental states of Eric and Dylan based upon their behavior, writings, and videotapes. I have also derived information from friends and adults who knew them and from media reports. In addition, I also talked to an FBI profiler. I have also attempted to explore the nature of their relationship and how it led them to try to blow up their school and kill as many of their peers as they could.

Central to Freudian and social interaction psychological theories is the belief that the human mind is generated and shaped from the interactions of individuals with their environment, especially their human environment. This insight was codified at the beginning of the nineteenth century with Freud’s (1952) essay, “The Ego and the Id”; George Herbert Mead’s (1964) work on mind, self, and society; and Charles Horton Cooley’s (1902) description of the “looking glass self.” The self, or what we perceive ourselves to be, is an amalgam of attitudes, orientations, and social categories that have been internalized through the socialization process and is influenced by our reference groups (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Sherif and Sherif 1964). As children grow, the family declines in importance as a reference group relative to the peer group, which emerges into primacy during adolescence (Harris 1999). Both theoretically and practically, it makes sense that the family provides the basis for early childhood psychological development, which is taken over by other agencies as the child grows, including the school, the peer group, and the media. In many cases, the family competes with other socialization agencies for the attention and adhesion of their children. Norms and values of the school, peer group, and mass media may conflict with those of the family, creating intergenerational conflict as the children become independent from their parents.

Of familial influences on Eric and Dylan, little is known; however, prior to adolescence, both boys and both families were described as normal. Although friends and neighbors may have little insight into the internal workings of the family, they do see the consequences in the attitudes and behaviors of the children. What we do know for sure is that prior to adolescence, no alarm bells rang for either boy or either family. As far as we can tell, for both boys, the spiral downward into hatred and violence began in middle school. As I noted above, middle school is the point in time where the peer group assumes ascendancy in a child’s life and can be a terrorizing force. In southern Jefferson County, middle school children faced an unusual situation in which a single middle school



fed into the local high school. In addition, the peer group structure in middle school was influenced by community sports leagues, one of the very few organizations that spanned the entire area. For preadolescents, sports leagues, church clubs, and shopping malls are the main venues that bring them into contact with children outside their own elementary school catchment areas. Sports leagues, more than the other two venues, integrated children from all over southern Jefferson County into organized interaction. Because of their size and popularity, they provided the basis for the structure of the adolescent peer culture.

In urban contexts, adolescent peer groups or gangs, are organized around ethnicity (Jankowski 1991). Because of the makeup of urban peer groups, acceptance is premised on ethnic group membership, which constitutes the basis of solidarity. In most suburban contexts, the peer group is not fractionated by ethnicity, and, furthermore, it assumes a unitary structure with athletes at the top (Eckert 1989; Wooden and Blazak 2001). This unitary structure tends to create an environment in which interpersonal competitiveness takes precedence over intergroup conflict. Eric and Dylan found themselves at the very bottom of a nasty pecking order.

Some aspects of identity are chosen, and others are thrust upon us. Identities have both personal and social components. The major social categories that form identity— such as gender, race, social class, and age—are those over which people have little control. Eric and Dylan were stigmatized as losers, which subjected them to predatory treatment that they “deserved” because of their degraded status. The predatory treatment they received was legitimated within the peer culture because in American society, people at the bottom of the social structure are perceived as being there because of the choices they made, which reflect their own degraded morality. The conflation of the moral with the social justifies the predatory behavior directed toward outcast students. The fact that Eric and Dylan, who were preyed upon by student athletes, also bullied those who were weaker than they demonstrates the normative structure of the peer group in terms of violence. Even though their degraded status in the peer group system was a fact, they rejected it, and constructed alternative identities on the Internet and in their videotapes.

A tremendous amount of thought, to the point of obsession, was spent by Eric and Dylan in avenging themselves on their peers. Their desire for revenge permeated practically everything they did from video games to English assignments. They cultivated their anger, developing a plot to destroy their school and kill as many of their peers as they could. Even though Eric drew up a hit list, their primary target was the peer structure, the secondary target was the

community at large, and the tertiary target was American society. In an interview on National Public Radio on the fifth anniversary of the shootings, Brooks Brown stated that Eric and Dylan were crazy, but it was Columbine that made them that way (Brand 2004).