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GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

IN THIS STUDY, I have examined school and community factors that prompted Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold to bomb their school and shoot their peers. Apparently, the most significant factor that generated the boys' aggression was the hostility directed at them by the jocks, especially the members of the football and wrestling teams. A second factor was the arrogance of the evangelical students who established themselves as a moral elite in the high school and who saw themselves as superiors who had the right to proselytize other students on campus. This practice especially affected the outcast students. Because many of the abusers and bullies were members of the evangelical community, many non-evangelical students, including Klebold and Harris, saw the behavior of the evangelical students as hypocritical and self-serving. The overlapping combination of athlete abusers and self-appointed evangelical moral elitists alienated many Columbine High School students. Clearly, Klebold and Harris possessed a powerful combination of anger and resentment which drove them to their heinous act.

I have explored the larger cultural context in which the Columbine shootings occurred and suggest that Harris and Klebold were influenced by the rise of paramilitary culture in the early-to-mid-1990s that culminated in the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City in 1996. American culture had become increasingly intolerant of deviation from the cultural

norm. This intolerance was reflected throughout society in increased aggression by the American upper class against all lower classes, with special aggressiveness toward the poor and disfranchised. We witnessed a U.S. foreign policy that waged optional wars against weak, third world countries. The media played on these themes and celebrated the strong and the powerful, which both implicitly and explicitly reinforced existing power relationships. Resistance to the domination of corporate America and its unholy alliance with the Christian right was weak and ineffectual.

One of the few groups that resisted the increasing corporatization of America was in the adolescent youth culture. Musical genres such as punk, heavy metal, rap, hip-hop, and hard-core offered a critique of everyday life. Youths saw a consumer culture in which people are defined in terms of their social status and their ability to consume. By the 1990s, the white subcultures of resistance were generically characterized as goth. Young goths viewed the power exercised over their lives not as corporate capitalism but rather in terms of the predation they experienced at the hands of their higher status peers, the predator athletes, or jocks. Admired by the community for their physical aggression, the jocks were supported and protected by administrators and teachers, many of whom were coaches or former coaches.

In most cases, adolescent outcasts were powerless to resist harassment, physical violence, and stigmatization dealt out by their elite peers. The weaker students were labeled “losers” and “deviants.” In turn, Gothic adolescent subcultures took an ironic position toward their situation; they praised that which was ostensibly antisocial. They listened to music that celebrated violence, misogyny, meaninglessness, anger, revenge, drugs, and being a loser. They took drugs to obliterate consciousness and engaged in interpersonal violence as an alternative to boredom. However, as the 1990s progressed, the most desperate, or as in the case of Columbine, the most desirous of fame, increasingly resorted to retaliatory violence. Many students brought weapons to school. Sometimes the weapons were tools of intimidation. Sometimes the outcast students shot at their tormentors. Ironically, in most of these cases, they simply attacked the most convenient targets. The Columbine shootings marked a cultural watershed in school violence.

Through a discussion of the issues related to the Columbine shootings in particular and rampage shootings in general, I want to offer an explanation of adolescent violence. From the outset, the evangelical community has attempted to define the Columbine shootings as a consequence of the secularization of society and the removal of religion from the schools. Most of the books written about Columbine have originated in the evangelical community. This book is the first

attempt to analyze the Columbine shootings from a social science perspective. America is supposedly a democratic, pluralistic society in which freedom of expression is written into its legal structure. In that spirit, I will spend some time addressing issues raised by the evangelical community.

An essential element is the role of football and other sports in American communities and the methods by which sport programs can pervert the educational goals of local high schools. With the tacit acceptance of many adults and the active participation of a few, sports fever can generate a toxic environment for many adolescents.

We must evaluate the social stratification and goals of Columbine High School. What mistakes were made? What was done right? To what extent have the changes initiated by the school administration changed the environment of Columbine High since the shootings? Why is it important to study the causes of the shootings at Columbine? To what extent is the internal structure of Columbine applicable to the rest of American high schools?

Finally, I wish to address the relationship between the community and the well-being of its adolescents. Is the community responsible for the physical health and socio-emotional development of its youth? It has become clear to me that the middle school years are critical in the formation of adolescent subcultures. The question to be addressed is, How can middle schools and their communities facilitate the development of healthy adolescents?

We must examine what theories, research, and experiences have shown to be successful in the reduction of violence in high schools. First, we need to develop a theory that explains the existence of everyday violence in high schools. Second, we have to examine existing programs designed to reduce violence in terms of their empirical and theoretical efficacy. Third, we need to listen to high school students about their experiences and about what they think should be done about interpersonal violence among their peers.

GOOD AND EVIL AT COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL

The Christian right has taken upon itself the task of identifying the causes of the Columbine shootings in particular and school violence in general (Epperhart 2002; Huckabee 1998; Porter 1999; Scott and Rabey 2001; Watson 2002). They have cast the Columbine shootings in terms of good versus evil, with Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris as the agents of the devil. In view of this, it is necessary to address the following issues with spokespersons for the evangelical community:

1. Did Eric and Dylan target evangelicals in their rampage?
2. Why did evangelical commentators downplay or ignore bullying as a factor in the shootings?
3. Why did the evangelical commentators blame secular institutions and liberalism for the shootings?
4. Why did the evangelical community not engage in introspection about their culpability in the shootings?
5. Why did the evangelical community exploit the shootings for proselytizing and recruitment?
6. Why did evangelical commentators use blatantly counterfactual and spurious arguments to make their case?

Zoba (2000) maintained that Harris and Klebold targeted evangelical Christians in their rampage. Her evidence for this was the hostility toward evangelicals displayed by the boys in the basement tapes (see pages 91–92 for the text). She also claimed that evangelical students Rachel Scott, Cassie Bernall, and a third unnamed student were shot execution style. According to the police report, Harris and Klebold were standing approximately fifteen feet from Rachel Scott when they shot and killed her and wounded Richard Castaldo. Therefore, she could not have been shot execution style. Additionally, the description of the shooting of Cassie Bernall was confirmed by several witnesses: Eric Harris stuck his shotgun under the table in the library and said, “Peek-a-boo,” and shot Cassie Bernall in the face. There is no evidence that Klebold or Harris knew Cassie Bernall or identified her as a Christian evangelical. As shown in Chapter 3, neither shooter talked to Cassie Bernall; Josh Lapp, the boy who originally stated that the shooters asked Cassie Bernall whether she believed in God, was across the room from her, near Valeen Schnurr, who was asked if she believed in God. Emily Winant, who was under the desk next to Cassie, testified that the boys did not speak to her, even though Emily was pressured by evangelicals to confirm the story that Cassie had died defending her beliefs. Cassie happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Rachel Scott was unknown to Harris and Klebold. I cannot comment on the third unidentified person.

According to Zoba (2000), three of the twelve students killed by Klebold and Harris were evangelicals. Although the school keeps no statistics on the religious backgrounds of its students, I asked several students and staff members, including Principal DeAngelis (the latter would not comment) on the proportion of students at Columbine who were evangelicals. Estimates were between 35 percent and 45 percent. If Zoba’s figures are correct, evangelical students were actually underrepresented among the dead. The only person who was singled out

and executed was Isaiah Sholes, who was killed because he was African American. There is absolutely no evidence that Klebold and Harris sought out evangelical students to kill. They attacked targets of opportunity. Their original plan to set off bombs in the cafeteria would have been the ultimate act of random violence, except that they had placed the bombs where the student athletes usually sat.

When Bill Epperhart (2002) rhetorically asked, “Why did Columbine happen?” he answered his own question: “[P]eople have tried to come up with all kinds of reasons that it happened. But this is not a race issue, not a clique issue, not a jock issue. This is a spiritual issue, a heart issue” (91). Bruce Porter (1999), who claimed that he wanted to understand why this happened in his community did not even mention bullying. Zoba (2000) mentioned bullying in passing but did not explore it as a serious possibility.

Within a month of the shootings, several of the news media had reported on issues of “jock elitism,” and bullying in the halls of Columbine (Adams and Rusakoff 1999; Flynn 1999; Greene 1999; Von Drehle 1999). I think there are two reasons why the evangelical community overlooked the role that bullying played in the shootings. From the outset, the evangelical community scripted the shootings as a struggle between good and evil, with the evangelical community assuming the role of goodness and Klebold and Harris, along with secularism and political liberalism, in the role of evil. In this Manichean view, the evangelical community was cast as the innocent victim, which stood for God against the powerful forces of darkness. Once that frame became the defining image of the Columbine shootings, all data that did not conform to that image was regarded as irrelevant.

Second, the shootings rocked the community to its foundations. People were asking, “How could it happen here?” Although many people were asking the question out of pain and anguish, it was a valid question. It was also a question that made members of the evangelical community uncomfortable. Why did the worst shootings in the history of American education occur in their neighborhood? The response of the evangelical community was to point fingers elsewhere and engage in what can be described as reaction formation and projection. Since the evangelical community was a priori defined as good, the cause had to be an external agent, such as Satan, as manifested by the federal government or believers in secular humanism.

This, of course, leads to the next question as to why evangelicals blamed secular institutions for the shooting. Ironically, secular institutions, including the school, the federal government, and the media, played critical roles in the shootings but not in the ways suggested by spokespersons for the evangelical

community. The school should shoulder some of the blame because of its *laissez-faire* attitude toward bullying and its failure to rein in the aggression of its athletes in the hallways and in its environs. It is not because it refused to display the Ten Commandments or required all students to recite a state prescribed prayer. The federal government played a role because it exemplified bullying with a foreign policy of aggression against weak and dependent nations and a domestic policy that rewarded wealth and blamed poverty on its victims. In the eight years leading up to April 1999, a hereditary upper class vilified the Clinton Administration and did everything it could to make it ineffectual and to drive Clinton out of the White House. The media played a role through its celebration of winners, its sensationalism of violent news stories, and the vilification of the powerless.

The evangelical community, and to a lesser extent school officials, denied the obvious. The major causes of the shootings could be located in their own community. Bill Epperhart (2002), quoted above, explicitly denied any role the jocks had in creating the conditions that gave rise to the massacre. Similarly, Principal DeAngelis denied that bullying by members of the wrestling and football teams was occurring in the halls of Columbine High School. He claimed that neither Klebold nor Harris came to him to complain about their treatment by the athletes (Garbarino and deLara 2002). Yet, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 5, any student complaining about their treatment by the jocks could not depend upon protection by the administration and would open themselves up to retribution. It was common knowledge around Columbine High School that “jocks ruled”—it was even written on the bathroom walls—and victims appeared powerless to do anything about it.

Protestantism, which posits that a believer has a personal relationship with an all-knowing, all-seeing God, has been traditionally a religion of deep personal introspection. I do not know what kind of introspection occurred among individuals, but collectively the evangelical community immediately distanced themselves from any culpability, as detailed in Chapter 3. Simplistically, Klebold and Harris were the agents of Satan. The only person to suggest that forces in the community were responsible for the rampage shootings was student Brooks Brown, who said that if Harris and Klebold were monsters, they were made that way by the school (Austin and Mendez 2004).

Nobody in the evangelical community suggested a prior cause for Harris and Klebold’s evil acts. As we have seen, they even denied the possibility. This is a sad commentary. Several of the students I interviewed noted that several athletes who participated in the harassment of Klebold and Harris and other students were “deep Christians” or evangelicals. A number of students complained

about the hypocrisy of evangelical students who, on the one hand claimed their spiritual superiority because they had been born again, while on the other hand, they seemed to party frequently, get drunk, take drugs, and engage in premarital sex along with the rest of their peers.¹ This apparent hypocrisy was also applied to violence, since some members of the evangelical community were absolved of any blame for creating the environment that led to the shootings in the first place. Take for example this explanation by Reverend Bill Oudemolen:

When I was standing on the corner of Pierce and Bowles near Columbine High School [right after the shooting], I had the sense that there was only one way I could explain it. I believed I *did* smell the presence of evil—not that it alleviates the blame that I would place on Harris and Klebold. I believe they made choices and were responsible. But who is the author of the evil? My theological category for this is that Satan is the author of evil—a personal being, fallen angel Lucifer, a being of light who falls in the act of rebellion and devises all these plans (Zoba 2000, p. 167, emphasis in original).

Many pastors of the evangelical community, including Bruce Porter of Trinity Christian Center, Bill Oudemolen of Foothills Bible Church, and Jerry Nelson of Southern Gables Church used the shootings as an opportunity for evangelizing and recruitment, especially among young people (Cullen 1999a; Porter 1999). There is no doubt that the religious community in southern Jefferson County provided the students suffering the trauma of the shootings places where they could gather together and obtain spiritual sustenance in a supportive environment. But these were not the only places. A parent told me that in the weeks after the shootings large numbers of kids, maybe twenty or thirty in a group, would go from one kid's house to another and hang together. Parents would provide a safe, supportive environment and food for the kids to eat.

Behind the pain and anguish of the young people and their need to gather together in the wake of a tragedy, they desired a supportive community. There was a quest to have answers to difficult questions such as, Why do bad things happen to good people? Simultaneously, some leaders of the evangelical community exploited the situation for their own benefit. Chief among these was Bruce Porter, who blazed his Torchgrab Ministry at Rachel Scott's funeral (Porter 1999).

At Rachel's funeral I was honored to issue a challenge to quite possibly the largest audience in the history of the planet to "pick up the torch" that Rachel and other believing kids at Columbine had carried in their

school. I received so many responses from those across the world who had taken that challenge to heart that my mind reeled. . . . Spontaneously, scores of rallies began to spring up across the nation. I spoke at several of them. . . . One of these, held in San Jose and organized by Pastor Dick Bernal and dozens of churches in the San Francisco Bay area, had an attendance of more than 16,000 people. . . . A portion of Rachel's funeral, with my challenge to take up the torch Rachel carried, was presented. Thousands of youths leapt to their feet, held up their arms, and cheered. The powers of darkness were no doubt shaken that night!

The messages shared during the Columbine Torchgrab Youth Rally in Littleton will go down in history as pivotal to the next wave of God's moving in our world . . . (84–85).

From Bruce Porter's perspective, he is doing God's work and hallowing the memory of Rachel Scott. He is heartened by the response of his audiences who seem to be dedicating their lives to her example. He claims that Rachel was carrying a torch symbolizing a spiritual revolution of compassion, mercy, and love; young people should pick up her torch and carry on her work. His book ends with the exhortation to stand up and declare:

I will live for Jesus Christ and not for myself! I will lift my voice in this generation and declare the truth and righteous standards of the Kingdom of God! I will carry, with bold proclamation, the martyr's torch! (114; emphasis in original).

From the outside, despite Porter's professed intentions, his actions seemed crass and self-aggrandizing. Hyperbolic statements such as "the largest audience in the history of the planet" and "[t]he messages shared during the Columbine Torchgrab Youth Rally in Littleton will go down in history as pivotal to the next wave of God's moving in our world" reveal an astounding sense of grandiosity. That Bruce Porter could put himself at the head of a "movement" that expresses the will of God might strike an outsider as extremely arrogant. How is Bruce Porter's Torchgrab Ministry more valid an expression of God than Reverend Marxhausen's ministering to the needs of the Klebold family, for which he was reviled by many members of the evangelical community? Porter's sense of entitlement as one who speaks and does the will of God without question reflects the hubris of many in the evangelical community that alienates not only nonbelievers and members of other religious traditions but other Christians as well.

Underlying the evangelicals' thrust into the spotlight as both a wounded community and a self-perceived source of spiritual redemption were the quests for fame and notoriety and a flood of donations. Although Cullen (1999a) suggested that the reaction of the evangelical community was, in part, a response to their own demonization by nonevangelicals and their exclusion from mainstream media, once the media focused on them, their response was telling.

Many of the local clergy were appalled at the behavior of some of the evangelical pastors in their attempt to grab the limelight, use public events for personal and political agendas, and exploit the death of children, all in the name of God (Cullen 1999a). In addition, the evangelical community was not afraid to use coercion to push their definition of the situation. Emily Wynant's family was inundated with calls urging her to confirm that Cassie Bernall was asked whether she believed in God before she was shot. The harassment was so extreme the family had to disconnect their telephone. When it became clear that the evidence did not support the claim that Cassie died defending her faith, the *Rocky Mountain News* sat on the story for two weeks, fearing to print it because of the backlash of the evangelical community. That lapse constituted a serious violation of journalistic ethics (Cullen 1999b).

Dave McPherson, the youth director of the West Bowles Community Church, said that the youth group had attempted outreach to the isolated and nonconformist students at Columbine. According to those nonconformist students, the outreach consisted of telling them that if they didn't change their ways, they would burn in hell. Reverend Marxhausen reported that in the wake of the shootings, evangelical students were using the shootings as a pretext for recruitment. Evangelical students at Columbine were telling other students that if they just accepted Christ as their savior, their sufferings would be alleviated. Marxhausen was outraged at such behavior because of its insensitivity to the feelings of others; furthermore, such a simplistic solution to the complex problem of coping actually interfered with the grieving process.

The evangelical community in the wake the Columbine shootings revealed itself as having compassion for their own members but not for those whose beliefs were different. After the shootings, all religious groups, whether mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic, or evangelical, opened their houses of worship to grieving members of the community. Parents, religious and secular, selflessly opened their homes to grieving students who huddled together in large groups. However, it was only the evangelicals who opportunistically took advantage of the situation to further their own ideological and material interests. It was only the evangelical community that attempted to take over and dominate the nationally televised memorial service. It was only the evangelical community that asserted its

version of events in contradiction to the facts and attempted to coerce those who did not adhere to the party line. It was only evangelical ministers who claimed that their fallen children had a direct line to heaven while those who were not evangelicals were waiting in purgatory.

FOOTBALL AND TOXIC HIGH SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

For most students at Columbine High School, the hallways were commodious. For the athletes, they constituted a territory over which they rule to this day. For a small minority of students, they were sources of hidden terror. A student could be standing at his locker and get shoved into it. He could walk around the corner and come face-to-face with a nemesis who continually bullied him, whose eyes glowed with the knowledge of privileged opportunity. Minding his own business, a student suddenly might be grabbed by a couple of football players and stuffed into a trash can. While videotaping Eric Harris and another friend as they were walking down the hall, Dylan Klebold was hit by a fellow student wearing a Columbine football sweatshirt. All of these events occurred in the halls of Columbine High School. Judging by the content of talk shows in the wake of the Columbine shootings, such experiences were commonplace throughout the nation.

When I was interviewing in Columbine, a parent told me, “[T]he school is run by the coaches.” I knew that Principal DeAngelis was a former baseball coach whose teams won two state championships. He was also an assistant football coach. Coaches were also deans, and, of course, many of the faculty members coached part-time. However, I had a hard time comprehending what she meant. Curriculum is determined by the state; departments have chairpersons; principals have a multitude of duties requiring their attention other than athletics, as Principal DeAngelis was anxious to point out to me. Additionally, Columbine had a strong academic reputation. Many of its teachers were inspirational and provided an alternative point of view for students. One of the great virtues of Columbine High School was that it offered most students a favorite teacher with whom they could talk.

What this parent meant was that the overwhelming tenor of the high school was sports related. The core of the most influential faculty members and administrators was formed of coaches and former coaches. DeAngelis was the formal leader of that collectivity. Although the school was certainly proud of its academic program and the accomplishments of its graduates, sports appeared to be first on

the agenda. This emphasis was apparent in a number of ways: the tributes to DeAngelis in his office for his coaching accomplishments, the trophy cases at the east entrance of the school, the athletic Hall of Fame in the gymnasium corridor, the wall of sports pictures in one of the dean's offices. When I walked into the administration office on my first visit, two newly won state championship trophies, one for soccer and one for football, were sitting around apparently because the staff had to rearrange trophy cases in order to include them. But most of all, the athletes, especially the male athletes, controlled the hallways and had privileges beyond those of the average student.

Although there are no statistics, this pattern of sports domination of high schools is apparently the norm in America. Some high schools, such as Glen Ridge in northern New Jersey in the mid-1990s (Lefkowitz 1997) and Permian High School in Odessa, Texas (Bissinger 1990), seem to be run more like sports teams with academic programs as an afterthought. This was especially the case of Permian, where students were learning from textbooks that were fifteen years out-of-date and the football team spent \$70,000 for a chartered jet airplane for visiting games. In the early 1980s, the school board spent \$5.6 million for a state-of-the-art football stadium that held slightly under 20,000 fans in a city with a population of slightly under 90,000. The football coach, who also served as athletic director, taught no classes and earned half again as much as a teacher at the top of the pay scale.

In the previous chapter, I pointed out that over the past twenty-five years, post-modern culture has increasingly focused on the cult of celebrity. Baudrillard (1983) has characterized contemporary postmodern culture as celebrating the hyper-real. For advertisers to sell a product to a sufficiently manipulated audience, first they need to get the reader's or viewer's attention. They do this by sensationalizing or "hyping" the product, associating it with the trappings of what it is not: sexuality, existential meaning, and social status. Sometimes, advertisers merely place their product in an alien context so that it is out of place in a field/ground configuration.

Celebrity is used not only to sell products but to reinforce notions of superiority and inferiority in contemporary society. Celebrities are larger-than-life and, as noted in the previous chapter, are used as commercialized role models in popular culture. Different rules apply to their behaviors in much in the same way that the aristocracy operated according to different rules than the peasantry during feudal times. The culture of celebrity filters down to high schools. It is played out in the relationships of high school sports stars and students of substantially lower status. High school sports stars, popularly known as "jocks," are both adulated and despised. They are lauded for their achievements on the field

and the approbation they bring their schools and communities. As Bissinger (1990) witnessed, Permian football players were continually given favors by members of the business community, accorded leniency by local police, and exempted from school work while being given passing grades by teachers.

In Columbine, as in Glen Ridge and Permian High Schools, football players, especially the stars, had easy access to sexual favors from any number of willing female peers. For some, this form of social wealth was insufficient. Bissinger (1990) noted that a sophomore girl was desperate to have sex with members of the football team. Team members, regarding her as a wannabe, photographed the encounter and showed pictures around school. The football players at Glen Ridge purposely had anonymous sexual liaisons with girls they hardly knew, preferring “circle jerks,” where they would gather around and masturbate to see who would ejaculate first. Their sexual experiences culminated in the rape of a girl who was mentally retarded. They even tried to restage the rape, this time videotaping it.

In Columbine and in Glen Ridge, members of the football team jealously guarded their status as alpha males through intimidation of those of lesser status. They used physical abuse and sexual humiliation by publicly referring to them as “fags,” “homos,” and “queers.” This probably occurred at Permian High School as well, but was not reported on by Bissinger, who was a sports writer and was more interested in the exploits of the football team on the field.

For high school athletes, such adulation is corrupting. It sends them a message that they are better than other people, that they can treat others any way they want without fear of retribution, and that there will always be somebody available to save them from their own worst impulses. To be a high school sports star is a heady experience from which some never recover. For example, several of the stars on the Permian High School football team were recruited by Division IA universities for their football teams. Some of them did not last very long as college players. It was not because of lack of talent but because college football did not provide the community status that high school did (Bissinger 1990).

Yes, there was easy access to sex with good-looking girls, as there was in high school. Yes, they received gifts and under-the-table payments from adoring alumni. However, unlike high school, instead of being kings of the campus, they were segregated, living together, practicing together, and playing together. Although they were celebrated on Saturdays, the real action on campus was elsewhere: in classes, in fraternities and sororities, in the dorms. Athletes, especially football players, were perceived somewhat like other nonacademic university employees. Football players were assumed to be stupid unless proven otherwise. In many ways, they had less status and less fun than the average undergraduate.

Several students from Permian High School who went onto college claimed that they were never happier than when they played high school football (Bissinger 1990). The letdown was so great for some, they quit playing college ball. This happened to a former Columbine High School football team member as well. In the middle of his senior season as starting safety for the Colorado State University Rams, Landon Jones abruptly quit the team, apparently burned out on football (Phifer 2003). Jones was a star player at Colorado State; he was selected twice to the Academic all-Mountain West Conference team. His future seemed bright, yet he quit football.

Football has become incorporated into a hyper-masculinized subculture that emphasizes physical aggression, domination, sexism, and the celebration of victory. One of the most revered coaches in the history of the game, Vince Lombardi, once said, “Winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing.” Football is one of the most violent sports that can be played. As mentioned in the previous chapter, being an American male requires that one must be able to deal with violence. This is why one of the major aphorisms of football, repeated by Ronald Reagan who played college football, is “Football builds character.” More than in any other sport, defeat in football is associated with being physically dominated and humiliated. In other sports, such as basketball, soccer, and especially baseball, winning teams need not be physically dominant, although that may be the case. However, in football, the role of physical dominance in winning is much more important.

Football’s close association with militarism has been mentioned by numerous commentators, including George Carlin (2000–2006) in his comedy routine where he compares baseball and football :

In football the object is for the quarterback, also known as the field general, to be on target with his aerial assault, riddling the defense by hitting his receivers with deadly accuracy in spite of the blitz, even if he has to use the shotgun. With short bullet passes and long bombs, he marches his troops into enemy territory, balancing this aerial assault with a sustained ground attack that punches holes in the forward wall of the enemy’s defensive line.

In baseball the object is to go home! And to be safe!

In postmodern America, football has replaced baseball as the national pastime. Its celebration of aggression, territoriality, disciplined violence, and physical domination has been used as a metaphor for America’s relationship with the rest of the world. Therefore, football is fraught with symbolic meanings relating to masculinity, militarism, discipline, obedience, patriotism, and glory. If ever there was

a secular religious holiday, it would be Super Sunday when the NFC and the AFC play for the Lombardi trophy. While Thanksgiving is celebrated in elementary schools as a re-creation of the amity between the Pilgrims and Native Americans in appreciation of the harvest, by the time an American male reaches high school, the afternoon is taken up watching the Detroit Lions lose another football game.

In American postmodern culture, football has become war by alternative means. On Friday nights in the fall, communities are pitted against each other in a symbolic struggle of domination and subordination with the players on each team wearing the colors of their high school, struggling for victory on the fields of dreams. High school football players are soldiers on the battlefield where the identity of a school and the community are at stake.

The symbolic significance of football in American life strikes its most resonant chord in the high school football team. Quite literally, high school football teams fight over bragging rights. In most places across the United States, communities project their identity on the exploits of their football teams. In southern Jefferson County, the only institution that provides a communal basis of solidarity is the local high school. It achieves its identity primarily through the efforts of its football team. Therefore, resources are allocated to the football team far beyond those allocated for any other nonacademic activity. In some cases, such as Permian High School in Odessa, Texas, the imbalance of allocations is egregious.

In Columbine High School, the culture of hypermasculinity reigned supreme: the administration was dominated by coaches and former coaches; the football team controlled the hallways. This way of being was perceived as legitimate by the vast majority of the student body and the parent population. Columbine was a sports power, and the community took pride in its strong sports program. Ironically, Columbine High School had many other attributes of which parents and community members could be proud: a championship debating team, an award-winning marching band, a superior theater department, sportsmanship trophies, and a student body of which 85 percent went on to higher education. But the physical proof of these accomplishments is not nearly as evident throughout the building as is the evidence of football and other sports.

The heavy emphasis on football has corrupted many high schools. Too many high schools in America are dedicated to the pursuit of football glory instead of providing their students an education that will help them to become informed citizens of a democratic society and provide them with the basics for labor force participation. Too many high schools, such as Columbine High School, are run by former football coaches who obtain their positions through the old boy network. Too many faculty members in high schools are recruited and hired on their

abilities to coach team sports and only secondarily on their ability to teach students academic subjects. Too many communities tolerate substandard academic programs as long as the football team has a winning season. In too many high schools, the football team, or a group within the football team, constitutes itself as little more than a community sanctioned gang.

Football is a game played by twenty-two young men on a field 120 yards long. It consists of running, passing, blocking, and tackling. Somewhere along the way, it became identified with masculinity, militarism, community identity, and nationhood. The national cult surrounding football has spun wildly out of control. It has undermined the purposes of many high schools, corrupted adults, and perverted children. At Columbine High School, sadly, it appears to have been instrumental in the death of fourteen students and one teacher. It is pure irony that in the year following the shootings, the Columbine High School Rebel football team won the Colorado State 5A (large schools) championship, and Principal Frank DeAngelis used the victory as a demonstration of how Columbine was recovering from the wounds inflicted by Klebold and Harris. Meanwhile, many students were saying that bullying was back at Columbine (Berkow 2003; Meadows 2003).

If we wish to reduce violence in high schools, we have to deemphasize the power of sports and change the culture of hypermasculinity. Football players cannot be lords of the hallways, bullying their peers with impunity, sometimes encouraged by coaches with adolescent mentalities. However, asking American high schools to deemphasize their football programs is like calling for a socialist revolution: it is not going to happen. As a matter of fact, high school football is receiving increased importance nationwide. Television sports channels routinely cover high school football on a local and national basis. High school football teams are nationally ranked despite the fact that there is no rational basis for doing so. Even worse, several sports companies feature high school all-American teams. In the July 25, 2005, issue of *Sports Illustrated*, Reebok presented its preseason all-American high school football team. High schools had not even begun fall practice, and Reebok predicted stellar performances from these adolescents. I wonder if the executives at Reebok ever considered what influence such expectations might have on a seventeen-year-old.

COLUMBINE RETROSPECTIVE

One of the more disheartening aspects of this study was that several years after the shootings, Columbine High School had, in many ways, returned to the *status quo ante*. In May 2003, I sat down with seven Columbine seniors (six boys

and one girl) in a restaurant near the high school. They were finishing lunch, and I identified myself as a sociologist and asked if I could talk with them. It was clear from the outset that they understood that I was an outsider inquiring about the inner workings of the high school. I was assured by these students that everybody respected everybody else, that the administration was doing a wonderful job, and that bullying had disappeared. The following came from my field notes:

One student said that Columbine HS has a zero tolerance policy for bullying on campus. The students repeated the phrase, "I'm offended; you're suspended." They lauded their teachers. One student said that they were all understanding. The consensus was that that was a bit of an exaggeration, but that it wasn't that far off the mark (Recorded May 9, 2003).

It was difficult to tell whether the students believed what they were telling me or whether they were appeasing yet another academic/reporter/snoop coming into their community with the intent of sullyng the reputation of Columbine High School. My field notes indicated that the students were aware that they were painting an impossibly positive picture of the school. However, I could not determine their sincerity.

A couple of days later, I interviewed two parents, one who was an employee of the high school. Both parents told me that bullying had returned to the high school. Several students testified that in the weeks following the shootings, barriers had come down between student groups. There was a genuine feeling of solidarity among Columbine students, and people were sensitive to and caring of each other. However, the summer intervened, and when they returned to school in the fall, the lessons of the previous year had been forgotten. The football and wrestling team members resumed their domination of the halls, and the caste system reconsolidated itself with those at the top unafraid of defending their superior status through physical or symbolic violence, such as that delineated in Chapter 4. Several students claimed that their younger brothers and sisters who were presently attending Columbine High School told them that they either had been witness to or the victim of bullying. Six months later, after the Columbine High Rebel football team won the 2003 state championship, *Newsweek* published a retrospective article (Meadows 2003). *Newsweek* reporters were told by students that bullying had returned to the school.

Columbine High School had reverted back to a system where two contradictory realities existed: the reality from above, supported by Principal DeAngelis, the rest of the administration, and the athletes, affirmed that students respected each other, that homophobia was at a minimum, and that, with the

exception of a few bad apples who had graduated years earlier, bullying did not exist at Columbine. The reality from below ran counter to this claim and suggested that privileged students and the administration were in denial; students were routinely harassed and humiliated by the same students who claimed that bullying did not exist. The athletes whom I met in the restaurant, when asked about calling other students “fags,” “homos,” “queers,” or “cock suckers,” claimed that, yes, they used those terms, but only in fun among friends and, of course, they were just kidding.

Before discussing the shortcomings of the Jefferson County School District and Columbine High School in their efforts to prevent rampage shootings, I would like to discuss some of the positive steps that they did take. First, they did not lock down the high school. On my first visit to the school in the spring of 2003, an armed police officer greeted me at the door. This was because the school had received a bomb threat that day; it was finals week. On my other visit to the school in the spring of 2004, I saw no armed uniformed officers. It was school policy not to have armed officers on campus. Security had been enhanced in several other ways: increased security cameras monitoring the hallways, closer liaison with the sheriff’s office, three on-campus unarmed security officers, and the sharing of information about students who were in trouble with the law. With the exception of a memorial tablet at the entrance of the new library, there was no evidence that horrible shootings had taken place in that school. Although my observations of students in the school were extremely limited, I did see students going about their business in a relaxed and informal manner.

In the wake of the Columbine shootings, students, especially girls (Meadows 2003), upon hearing plans of their peers to attack their school or shoot a fellow student or teacher, were much more likely to break the peer code of silence and inform an adult authority, as in the case of the DeAnza College (California) and New Bedford, Massachusetts, incidents. This new willingness to tell on peers has been referred to as “the Columbine effect” (Newman 2004). In the hall by the gymnasium, Principal DeAngelis maintains a tip box. Any student who is aware of a potentially dangerous activity is encouraged to inform the administration about it anonymously. DeAngelis checks the tip box every morning. He testified about its importance:

Some of the leads that I get from [the tip box] are just phenomenal. We probably over the past four years have had other students concerned about their friends followed up on it. They have legitimate concerns; their friends were thinking of hurting themselves (Recorded May 12, 2003).

DeAngelis expressed great pride in his counseling program. Two components were described: the Links program and the peer counselors. The Links program was a long-standing program at Columbine High that existed prior to the shootings. High school juniors and seniors were trained over the summer as big brothers or big sisters, each responsible for six or seven incoming freshmen from Ken Caryl Middle School. Their job was to help with the transition between middle school and high school. Each incoming freshman would have an upper class student who would provide them with advice and help as they acclimated themselves to high school. One of the major functions of the program was to protect the incoming freshmen from hazing by older students. The program was very popular, and the students and parents with whom I talked regarded it highly.

Somewhat less successful than the Links program was the peer counseling program. Peer counselors were attached to the guidance department. They were supposedly trained in conflict resolution. However, their major function was to provide advice to students about normal problems of being an adolescent or problems in school. If students seemed to be having serious problems, peer counselors would refer them to an adult counselor. Both DeAngelis and a parent who was familiar with the program indicated that the students who were recruited were excellent. However, their roles were highly circumscribed, and they could not deal with issues related to teachers. Although they may have been trained in conflict resolution techniques, they were apparently used rarely. In my interviews with students, they were vaguely aware that the peer counselors had mediation skills. However, I did not encounter a single student whose conflicts with other students had been mediated by a peer counselor or anybody else, for that matter, with the exception of the disaster described by CL in Chapter 5. Interpersonal conflicts were dealt with primarily by counselors or deans; most students with whom I talked were not particularly satisfied by the outcome of the problem-solving efforts of school officials.

Principal DeAngelis viewed himself as supportive of all extracurricular efforts in the school. He was understandably sensitive about media reports regarding the emphasis on sports at Columbine. He stated to me:

People say boy, you support football. I say football, time out! You know about football because you're covering the game. But you didn't see me at the art show. Where were you? I mean, you're criticizing me for supporting football, but how come you're not there when I invite you to our art show, or when I invite you to come and see a play? I never see a reporter there, and yet you're criticizing me and you don't see me because you're not there.

And that's what drives me crazy. The other night, and I'm one of the few principals at the art show, we have all these pieces of art around, I went on the band trip a few years ago, and I said, "As reporters, you're criticizing me for the exact thing you're doing. At least I'm there, but you won't even come and cover some of the things. Show up at a play; show up at a band concert. Why aren't you there, reporting on that?" (Recorded April 28, 2004).

DeAngelis is correct when he avers that there was no way that he could have anticipated the assault on Columbine High School. He pointed out that he had absolutely no information about Dylan Klebold's and Eric Harris's arrest and remand to a diversion program, although his ignorance has been disputed by others. Until after the shootings, he was unaware of the existence of Eric's Trenchcoat Mafia web site that contained threats directed at the school. He was not privy to the threats that Eric made on the life of Brooks Brown. Even given the security changes, it would be difficult to anticipate a school assault. Over the past twenty years, there have been approximately thirty rampage shootings in American middle and high schools, an average of about 1 1/2 per year. They are extremely rare occurrences. Yet for every rampage shooting, there are literally thousands of verbalized threats and millions of discussions among students in which they fantasize about trashing their schools, as in the case of Melissa Sower, a disaffected Columbine High School student quoted in Chapter 5 (Cloud 1999).

DeAngelis stated that he was in touch with FBI profilers. The problems associated with profiling of school assaults are manifold: first, it individualizes what is essentially an issue of social relationships. Of the twenty-seven rampage shooters documented by Newman (1999), nineteen were socially marginalized among their peers compared to fifteen who evinced severe psychological disorders and fourteen who were abused or neglected or had other home-related problems. These findings were corroborated by Meloy, Hempel, Mohandie, Shiva, and Gray (2004). Second, and worse, is that profiling ignores the etiology of rampage shootings. Inferring from Newman's list and from media reports, minimally fifteen and perhaps as many as twenty of the rampage shootings were retaliatory. That is, the shooters perceived themselves as punishing peers or teachers who had done them wrong. Third is the problem of labeling. The major problem with profiling is the false positive. Certainly the Columbine shootings were retaliatory violence. For every rampage shooter, however, there are tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of students who fit the profile. It further victimizes students who, for whatever reason, dislike or are alienated from the school

and are otherwise socially marginalized. As noted by Gaines (2001), outcast students have enough problems without being labeled as potential rampage shooters. Once a student fits the profile, the perceptions of adult authorities are influenced by the expectations that the student will engage in violence. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, because authorities suspect the student of harboring violent tendencies. Therefore, the behavior of such a student is increasingly surveyed in expectation of uncovering violence.

The greatest problem with profiling is that it ignores entirely the context that generates the retaliation. DeAngelis and the profilers are looking through the wrong end of the telescope. However, the profiler perspective fits in with the dominant view of the problems at Columbine High School; they primarily reside in the persons of a small minority of disaffected students who bear watching. The dominant elites are absolved of any responsibility. Issues related to ostracism, defense of social privilege, homophobia, harassment, humiliation, and violence directed at lesser status peers are defined out of existence. Many people assume that because outcast students dress and behave differently than the majority of students, do not support the sports teams, have different tastes in music, and are otherwise different from the vast majority, they deserve what they get.

As a consequence of the shootings, Columbine now has a threat assessment team. The threat assessment team evaluates the seriousness of threats made to students or the school and crafts a response based upon the perceived seriousness of the threat (O'Toole 2000). Although the threat assessment team is supposed to evaluate the climate of the school, the evidence from this study suggests that adult authorities tend to be unaware of tensions between groups of students until threats are made or violence breaks out. A threat assessment team is a valuable tool for maintaining safety in the school. However, threat assessment is negatively focused and is brought to bear after a threat is made. The major emphasis of a school safety program should be the reduction of threat so that the threat assessment team does not have to meet in the first place. Positive approaches to school safety will be addressed in the next section.

As long as Principal DeAngelis and his supporters, who are manifold, believe that the Columbine shootings were the work of a couple of deranged outcasts (see, e.g., Cullen 2004) and had nothing to do with the internal climate of the high school, the vulnerability of the school to rampage shootings is as high after April 20, 1999, as it was before. In addition to security changes, the school instituted one other innovation of which DeAngelis was particularly proud, called "The American Students' Funding Program," in which students selected thirteen character traits: the Golden Rule [*sic*], compassion, confidence, courage, determination, generosity, integrity, justice, leadership, loyalty, respect, responsibility,

and teamwork. Volunteer students are divided into four groups: one that does community outreach, one that tries to improve student life, one that raises funds, and one that selects students who best exemplify each virtue and who are each given a \$1,000 scholarship. There is absolutely no evidence to indicate that this program helps to reduce school violence.

Delbert Elliott, Professor of Sociology at the University of Colorado, Director of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, and perhaps America's leading expert on school violence, pointed out that one of the most important contributing factors to school violence is the perception among the students that rules are enforced differentially:

One of the big issues we know exists [in] schools is [that] kids perceive the policies are not enforced uniformly—some kids get away with everything; some kids can't get away with anything. That undermines a sense of safety in the school. [K]ids start bringing [weapons] to school ... when they don't think the school is going to protect them. [T]hey have to protect themselves (Recorded May 13, 2003).

One of the main complaints of students at Columbine High School was that athletes were subject to a different set of standards than other students. The school was rife with rumors about coaches protecting athletes engaged in even felonious behavior. Students told stories about how they were harassed, embarrassed, or humiliated by athletes in the presence of coaches who either ignored or supported such behaviors. One student admitted that after being beaten up by a jock, he began taking a weapon to school, corroborating the observations made by Professor Elliott.

Ironically, Columbine High School sits within easy commuting distance of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. The Center operates as a clearinghouse for research on violence and reduction of violence in schools. In addition, the Center sponsors and conducts research on school safety. The Center is a national resource of information about school violence and about programs that can ameliorate it. Yet, no administrator from the Jefferson County School District has set foot in the Center. When I interviewed the superintendent of the school district, as soon as I asked her a question about violence prevention, she told me that the interview was terminated and escorted me from the premises. Professor Elliott had this to say about Columbine's antiviolence initiatives:

To my knowledge, Columbine is not implementing any proven programs. ... At this point in time all I know is that ... they have not

implemented any programs which have high credibility with respect to effectiveness (Recorded May 13, 2003).

PEACE EDUCATION

American high schools are both more and less violent than the public perceives. It is true that schools are safer than the streets and home (Brooks, Schiraldi, and Ziedenberg 1999). A child is less liable to be injured or killed in the school than practically any other place. Yet, schools, especially middle and high schools, are venues in which there is a great deal of hidden physical and psychological violence (Garbarino and deLara 2002; Greene 1999; Pankratz 2000). Although nearly all violence is low level with only a minuscule portion of it being observed or brought to the attention of authorities, it can be psychologically deleterious to the victims, dehumanizing to the perpetrators, corrosive for the social climate of the school, and can lead to an escalation of hostilities, usually fistfights. DeAngelis, the principal of Columbine High School told me, "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" (Recorded April 28, 2004). I have no reason to doubt his testimony. However, Columbine High School, like other high schools, has had substantial amounts of low-level violence. Klebold and Harris were never involved in a fight in their high school. Yet every male Columbine High School student I interviewed could recall at least one incident where he was physically intimidated by another student or had a physical confrontation with another student on campus, including the trading of punches. Every female student could relate at least one incident where she was humiliated, verbally abused, or witnessed physical violence on campus. I do not think that Columbine is any more or less violent than the average American high school. As I stated earlier, such violence is normative. It is so common that students do not even recognize it as violence until it is pointed out. Rampage killings are the extreme tip of the adolescent violence pyramid.

So how can violence be reduced in schools? First, the thesis of this study is that the prime source of conflict at Columbine High School, as it is among nearly all high schools in America, is the distribution of power within the school. The testimony of the students indicated that the vast majority of the violence was perpetrated downward from higher status to lower status students. Even outcast students like Klebold and Harris found students of lower status than themselves to bully. Second, the distribution of power and its exercise to protect and reinforce already existing social barriers generate two diametrically opposing

perspectives: the assumption on the part of high status students of their inherent superiority over the rest of the student body, and the perception by the rest of the student body of a lack of justice. Third, the faculty and the administration of the school, because of a lack of a systematic plan and an inherent bias in favor of high status students, reinforce the arbitrariness of power relationships among the students, leading victimized students to feel that they have no alternative other than to endure their punishment. For them, school is a place where absurdity reigns, predators are rewarded, and victims are punished. Even if they play by the rules, there is no guarantee that they will be better off than if they do not. Several Columbine students told me stories about going to the authorities to complain about being victimized in which the best outcome was that nothing happened. Students related stories about how their complaints were mishandled, resulting in greater ostracism and targeting by bullies. Students also indicated that retaliatory violence was treated the same as or harsher than the original violent act that lead to retaliation. This problem is not unique to Columbine High School; Garbarino and deLara (2002) found similar stories when talking to students about bullying. School authorities tended to be indifferent or incompetent when dealing with interpersonal violence among students. All students knew that by making their complaints to authorities, they were taking a huge risk and that the outcome was anything but assured.

The most serious problem in attempting to reduce violence in the school like Columbine is misdiagnosis. To this day, Principal DeAngelis has no viable explanation of the rampage shootings in his high school. He essentially accepted the Manichean explanation of the evangelical community that Klebold and Harris were instruments of Satan, committing evil against the good people of Columbine High School. As late as spring 2004, he insisted that bullying had nothing to do with the rampage shooting at Columbine, but rather, blamed the incident on the characteristics of the shooters. Most rampage shootings, including the ones at Columbine, have been retaliatory (Magee and DeBernardo 1999). As long as DeAngelis denies that the attack in his school was retaliatory, he will be unable to develop a viable antiviolence program. Because rampage shootings are such a rare occurrence, it is likely that he will never see a recurrence at Columbine. However, it is also true that once a norm is broken, it is likely to be broken again.² This means that there is a higher probability of a similar, copycat style shooting occurring in the halls of Columbine than elsewhere. Therefore, it is in the interests of residents of southern Jefferson County, Colorado, that antiviolence programs should be seriously considered.

If educators and the Jefferson County school system understand and accept that the shootings at Columbine were retaliatory, then they can design antivio-

lence programs to reduce the probability of another recurrence. However, educational inertia, lack of public support, and cognitive indolence militate against the institution of positive solutions. The good people of southern Jefferson County, for the most part, have refused to understand that although Klebold and Harris were victimizers, they were themselves victims of long-term and intense bullying. It is easy to see the dynamic that underlies this perspective. It is much easier to blame others than to assume any sort of collective responsibility. Members of the football and wrestling teams who control the halls of Columbine share responsibility; parents and community members who revile and loathe nonconforming students share responsibility; religious leaders who preach the superiority of their own creed rather than the common suffering of humanity share responsibility; coaches and administrators who ignored, tolerated, or actively encouraged bullying by the athletes share responsibility.

For an antiviolence program to work, it must be systemic, and it must change the internal social climate of the school. By systemic, I mean that it must extend below the high school to elementary and middle grades. Changing the climate of the school means altering the way in which administrators, teachers, and students interact in a school setting. The research is clear that top-down, zero-tolerance programs do not work and can produce counterproductive results (National Association of Attorneys General 2000; Skiba and Peterson 1999).

Researchers have demonstrated that bullying almost exclusively occurs when there are no adult witnesses (Garbarino and deLara 2002; Skiba and Peterson 1999). At Columbine, this was certainly true. Students were physically assaulted in the halls, in locker rooms, and during unsupervised play in the gym. Verbal harassment could occur anywhere. Therefore, any worthwhile antiviolence program must change the way in which students interact and change the climate of the school. This means that the school needs a critical mass of students involved in peacekeeping activities.

I also think that an effective antiviolence program must reach beyond the schools to the local community. A large portion of Columbine students belong to a variety of youth groups, many of which are associated with local churches. Because of the strength of religious institutions in southern Jefferson County, they have an important role to play in the reduction of youth violence. It is no leap from the worship of Jesus Christ as the savior of humanity, the Prince of Peace, to the institution of nonviolent conflict resolution programs or character education programs that emphasize tolerance, empathy, and compassion. As a matter of fact, the Society of Friends, or Quakers, has been involved in peace education and conflict resolution for many years. They have established institutes, programs, and workshops on peaceful conflict resolution. In addition, they have

produced numerous books, pamphlets, curricula, and resource guides. Conflict resolution programs need not be limited to a church youth groups; they can also be employed by secular or quasi-religious youth organizations such as scouting organizations and YM/WCAs. For example, the Boy Scouts of America should have a conflict resolution merit badge that would be required for the rank of Eagle Scout. Scouting organizations heavily emphasize citizenship and character development. It is surprising then that one can get a merit badge in riflery but not in conflict resolution.

A number of antiviolence programs have been implemented and evaluated. For my purposes, they can be classified into three major categories: (a) those for at-risk students, such as bullies, aggressive children, and children with emotional difficulties (Gregg 1998); (b) curricular initiatives, such as restructuring learning in the classroom (Aronson 2000), character education, violence awareness and avoidance, and the teaching of negotiation skills (Samples and Aber 1998); and (c) those that are directed at the resolution of interpersonal and intergroup conflicts (Wilson-Brewer, Cohen, O'Donnell, and Goodman 1991). The first category involves programs that may incorporate social skills training, guidance, psychotherapy, and family involvement. Although certainly important in the reduction of violence by targeting perpetrators, they are beyond the scope of this study because they are individualized.

The Jefferson County School District has treated the Columbine shootings as an aberration, which they were. However, the problem is that the violence that perpetrated the shootings is so common that it has become routine. Law enforcement solutions described to me by Principal DeAngelis are only a small part of the antiviolence picture. The response of Jefferson County has been reactive with few in the way of proactive programs, at least at the high school level. Numerous antiviolence programs exist that have been evaluated and have shown positive results in the reduction of interpersonal violence, teaching children nonviolent problem solutions, reduction of bullying, and changing school climates so that they encourage harmonious interpersonal relations (Aber, Jones, Brown, Chaudry, and Samples 1998; Cockrane and Saroyan 1997; DeJong 1993; Olweus, Limber, and Mahalic 1999; Samples and Aber 1998; Wilson-Brewer, Cohen, O'Donnell, and Goodman 1991). In addition, there are curricular interventions that reduce interpersonal competition and emphasize cooperation, such as the jigsaw method of organizing classroom learning (Aronson and Patnoe 1997).

Several comprehensive violence reduction programs have been developed and show promise. Programs developed by the Child Development Project, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and The Peace Foundation, have been

directed at building caring communities, cooperative education, respect for others, understanding of the law, teaching social skills and prosocial behavior, and anger management (Gregg 1998). Project Schools Teaching Options for Peace (STOP)/Safe Harbor is a multifaceted program that uses peer mediation, teacher training, parent education, and an antiviolence curriculum that has been shown to reduce feelings of helplessness related to violence and promote peaceful ways of resolving conflicts (National Institute of Justice 1995).

Perhaps one of the most successful antiviolence programs is the Bully Prevention Program, created by Olweus and Associates (Olweus 1993; Olweus et al. 1999) in response to a growing awareness of widespread bullying in Norway. The program was implemented countrywide and focused on reducing opportunities for bullying behavior and social rewards for engaging in bullying by creating a normative environment in the school that discourages bullying. The program begins by establishing a committee that plans to change school conditions and monitors those changes. Bullies and their parents are targeted for intervention. Firm limits are established for unacceptable behavior, and adults act as authority figures and positive role models. Students are actively involved in the program through a curriculum that uses role-playing, modeling, and classroom discussion to teach children how to cope with bullying. They become the first line of defense in generating an environment that does not tolerate bullying. Herein lies the key to the reduction of violence. Students must be actively involved in the solutions to violence; they must learn to practice nonviolent conflict resolution actively.

Most antiviolence programs, including those enumerated above, focus on bullying in the elementary and middle schools. This is as it should be because students should be taught how to deal with violence at a young age, and antiviolence programs should be taught from kindergarten through twelfth grade. However, beginning in middle school, a qualitative change occurs in the nature of bullying and interpersonal violence as the peer group assumes ascendancy as a reference group among young adolescents (Harris 1999). Bullying and harassment become less the aberrant behavior of an individual child and more institutionalized and collectivized as a method by which peers subcultures communicate dominance and establish hierarchies.

Columbine High School is an example of the meshing of bullying and peer group hierarchies. Everyone in Columbine High School was very much aware that a particular student was a bully and could turn on anybody at any time. Even though he was sanctioned by the administration for some of his misdeeds, he was protected by coaches. Because of his physical virtuosity and athletic prowess, he was a member of the leading crowd. He and his coterie of friends terrorized the rest of the student body with relative impunity. His egregious behavior was

tolerated by his high-status peers as long as he was targeting “loser students” and not focusing on his status-equals. Additionally, his bullying of lower-status students helped to reinforce the peer social structure and emphasize the dominance of the student elite through physical intimidation. Within the social structure of Columbine High School, the tepid attempts of the administration to control his behavior could not match the social rewards he received from his peers for his bullying. He graduated from Columbine in 1998. In the subsequent year, bullying did not abate because it was part of the structured social relations within the school. Outcast students such as Klebold and Harris adhered to the pattern by harassing students of even lesser status than they, such as students with disabilities.

Although researchers in bullying have acknowledged some of the qualitative differences in adolescence, their solutions have not really taken these differences into consideration (Aronson 2000; Garbarino and deLara 2002; Samples and Aber 1998). The special quality of adolescent bullying must be addressed in any antiviolence program or else it is doomed to failure or only marginal success. Any program to be successful must (a) change the climate of the school, (b) alter the relationships among peer subcultures, and (c) cede adult power to the students so that they can positively enforce antiviolence norms.

This latter aspect, I believe, is one of the most serious stumbling blocks to the implementation of a successful antiviolence program among adolescents. It is a necessary component of conflict mediation among peers. In Colorado in general and in Columbine in particular, discussions with educational administrators and law enforcement personnel revealed a lack of awareness and openness to conflict mediation programs using peer mediators. My interview with the superintendent of the Jefferson County Schools was abruptly terminated by her when I asked a question about what the district was doing to reduce violence in the schools. Principal DeAngelis, whom I thought would be interested in successful antiviolence programs, was unresponsive when my wife, a seasoned conflict mediator in the New York City Schools, who had established the conflict resolution program in a high school that was approximately the same size as Columbine, told him of the successes of the program in her own school.

The program has two components: conflict negotiation and conflict resolution. The conflict negotiation portion is an antiviolence curriculum that is designed to teach students negotiation skills so that they can avoid interpersonal conflicts. It makes use of proper speech and the logic used by a trained individual to turn potential conflict into peacemaking. It uses compromise and movement to a win/win situation.

The second component is conflict mediation, which involves learning the steps of nonviolent conflict resolution, interviewing, brainstorming, role-play, and modeling (DeJong 1993). The skills that are emphasized are active listening, assertiveness, expression of feelings, empathy, negotiation, and the airing of positions. These skills are taught in many antiviolence programs. They are usually instituted in the second year of the program, primarily because teachers (or administrators) have to be trained in the program. In 1993, in New York City, each high school had one teacher trained in conflict mediation, who would establish and run the program, and one teacher trained in conflict negotiation to teach students violence prevention. The conflict mediation coordinator was responsible for recruiting and training student (peer) mediators, establishing a room or site where mediations could be conducted confidentially, supervising and documenting mediations, and evaluating mediators. All students in the school must know that there is a place where they can talk out their differences in strict confidence.

Although conflict negotiation is important in an antiviolence program, the conflict mediation component offers the best possibility to confront already emerging conflict and change the climate of the school. With a critical mass of peer mediators who take their jobs seriously—and nearly all of them do—the school has a presence of students who are committed to antiviolence in the halls at all times. If they see fights brewing, they can intervene and offer mediation. Given the alternative of suspension, many students will opt for mediation. If students have disputes or feel that they are being victimized, they can go to the mediation coordinator and ask that the problem be mediated. In most New York City high schools, when students were suspended for fighting, they were required to have their dispute mediated upon entry back into the school.

Conflict mediation programs have been evaluated with promising results (Cassels 1993; DeJong 1993; Gregg 1998; Hawkins, Farrington, and Catalano 1998). The main problems with conflict resolution programs have been half-hearted support by administration and lack of willingness on the part of teachers to fully implement them (Bickmore 1999). One of the major problems of implementing conflict resolution programs is that it requires school officials to adhere to democratic values, empower students to be active participants in the solution, and provide them the resources for peaceful resolution of interpersonal conflicts. It means trusting students and ceding to them a certain amount of autonomy and control. In this writer's observations of over forty years in education, most educators are hesitant to cede power to students, even for issues that are beyond the classroom.

Even with teachers patrolling the halls, the locker rooms, and the playfields, if the culture of school is conducive to violence, violence will occur. Therefore, if the school wishes to reduce the level of interpersonal violence among its students, it must empower the students to solve their own problems. Obviously, students cannot be used to police other students. They do not have legitimate authority. However, with an effective conflict mediation program, student mediators can help their peers to resolve potentially violent conflicts in a peaceful manner.

I will discuss the program developed by the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution at Teachers College Columbia University because I have seen it in operation firsthand at a New York City high school. In this particular instance, my wife, Debra Larkin, was trained as a conflict mediator and ran a successful program for over ten years at Murry Bergtraum High School, in lower Manhattan, New York City. Over that period, the student population was 99 percent minority, with varying mixtures of Asian, black (Caribbean, African, and African American) and Hispanic (Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Central and South American) students. As the coordinator, Ms. Larkin promoted the program, recruited and trained students, and supervised and documented all mediations. In an eight-period day, mediations were conducted during six of those periods. The last two periods were used to train mediators and teach them English writing and literature in which the major theme was conflict and its resolution. The school allocated a room for conflict mediation, which was Ms. Larkin's classroom. Students knew that if they had a conflict they could go to the mediation room and schedule mediation.

The conflict mediation program was supported by the principal in the school and the high school superintendent, especially in the early days of its operation. The program was instituted in 1992 at the high school level in reaction to a gunfight that broke out in Thomas Jefferson High School and resulted in the death of a student and the wounding of a bystander and a teacher who tried to intervene (McFadden 1991). Mayor David Dinkins instituted a Safe Schools, Safe Streets initiative that funded conflict resolution programs in all New York City high schools (McKinley 1992). The central Board of Education established an Office of Conflict Resolution that coordinated the program in the five boroughs of the city. The board passed a resolution that required that all students who had been suspended for fighting had to go through conflict mediation before they could reenter their school. Each borough had a coordinator for conflict resolution programs who oversaw the operation of the programs in each high school, arranged conferences and training, and linked the program with other advocates of nonviolent conflict resolution, such as the United Nations and the Southern

Christian Leadership Conference. The New York City program was linked to national and international efforts at peaceful conflict resolution.

As the program grew over the years, the Murry Bergtraum High School maintained a critical mass of 100–150 peer mediators in a school of 2800 students. Mediations focused on pairs of students who had a dispute and could include as many as twenty or twenty-five or more students who were involved in the conflict. If all persons involved in the conflict were not included in the mediation, it could not be adequately resolved. In the vast majority of cases, upwards of 95 percent, the conflicts were resolved peacefully. In a small number of cases, disputants needed more than one mediation to resolve their conflict. Approximately two or three mediations per year failed to achieve a satisfactory conclusion. In this particular school, approximately 150–175 mediations were conducted each year. Although school district policy mandated that the program was not to deal with gang violence, it was clear that in some cases, local gangs used the mediation process to resolve differences and misunderstandings among opposing gangs.

Students for the program were recruited through promotions in the school by making presentations at school assemblies, distributing flyers, making announcements over the public address system, and gathering staff recommendations. Prospective mediators were interviewed by Ms. Larkin and peer mediators to assess their qualifications, fitness, and motivation. After the initial semester, student mediators began recommending their friends. In addition, Ms. Larkin discovered that some of the best potential mediators were students whose conflicts had been brought to the mediation room. Some of the most troublesome students in the school, upon being mediated, expressed desires to become mediators themselves. Not surprisingly, some of those students discovered hidden talents as mediators and became advocates for mediation and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

The vast majority of peer mediators took the program very seriously. Several students told Ms. Larkin that without the peer mediation program they would have been dead. They learned how to negotiate solutions to problems and how to deescalate and defuse confrontations. In addition, participation in the conflict mediation program gave mediators status among their peers. They were helpful, positive, and resourceful, and they helped people avoid violence and personal injury.

Peer mediators staged mock mediations in assemblies so that the other students understood the process. A group of students established a rap group and created raps that extolled nonviolent conflict resolution. In addition, the mediators visited elementary and other high schools to conduct mock mediations or

teach conflict mediation/negotiation skills. They met with other students to advocate for the program. Each year, anywhere from twenty-five to forty mediators would take a trip to the state capital to advocate for gun control legislation under the sponsorship of the New Yorkers against Gun Violence. Many of those students had seen the destructiveness of gun violence firsthand and worked to rid their environment of guns.

The program generated a critical mass of peace advocates in the student population. This critical mass of students altered the climate of the school, making it less violent. Students in the school felt safer because of the presence of the conflict mediation program. Confrontations were less likely to escalate to violence because of the necessity of one or more of those in conflict to protect their image or their egos. The mediation process allowed students to deescalate the conflict in a nonthreatening way. When mediators saw fights brewing, they brought the disputants to the conflict resolution room or informed the mediation teacher of the pending conflict so that she could intervene and offer mediation before the fight erupted.

Increasingly, programs are being offered at higher education institutions in conflict resolution. Stokes (2002) documented approximately fifty undergraduate and thirty graduate programs in the United States and Canada that offer degrees or certification in conflict mediation. Therefore, conflict resolution is not only a voluntary activity but also offers students a vocational option that they may not have considered. Several students from the Murry Burgraum program have pursued careers in conflict resolution as either undergraduates or graduate students. Many law schools now offer conflict resolution programs, and many corporations employ conflict mediators as an alternative to litigation (Riskin 1993).

Although the above example is from an inner-city school that has few white students, the research has indicated that conflict mediation can be used successfully in rural, suburban, and urban schools for literally all students from pre-kindergarten to graduate school, staff members, for adults in the workplace, and for family conflicts. However, adaptations must be made for suburban high schools (Cassels 1993; DeJong 1993; Gregg 1998; Hawkins et al. 1998; Samples and Aber 1998). All of the extant research on suburban high schools indicate that the dominant adolescent peer group is organized around athletics and is almost universally identified as jocks and their female counterparts (Bissinger 1990; Coleman 1961; Eckert 1989; Gordon 1957; Larkin 1979; Wooden and Blazak 2001). As with any subculture, a great variety of orientations, attitudes, and behaviors exist within it. If the peer mediation program is to work in such schools, it must have significant representation among peer mediators from male and female members of the leading crowd, especially members of the football

team. Without such representation, the program will lack legitimacy. Any student who wishes to be a quarterback of the football team or captain of any interscholastic sports team should be required to have a minimum of one semester's experience in conflict resolution training. Not only will this provide them with important leadership skills, it would link nonviolent conflict resolution with sports participation.

As important, the peer mediators must be representative of the school population. With any school, the person in charge of mediation must be sensitive to and aware of all of the various affinity groups, racial and ethnic categories, and subcultures within the school and make sure that each one is represented among the peer mediators. It is especially important that students will be included who are members of subcultures that are antischool. This means that in suburban high schools, peer mediators should include goths, stoners, skateboarders, bikers, and skinheads, if they can be recruited.

PEACE

This book was written because of a destructive act that killed fifteen Americans. It is postmortem because we are looking backward to examine why it occurred. In this chapter, we also look forward to see what can be done to prevent such attacks from happening in the future.

There is a substantial research base that provides important clues about how to reduce violence (Elliott, Hamburg, and Williams 1998; Mihalic, Fagan, Irwin, Ballard, and Elliott 2002), but sadly there is little political will to implement positive peace education policies in high schools. If this inquiry into the shootings at Columbine High School can be generalized, and I think it can, a large portion of incivility, harassment, and physical intimidation that occurs in the halls of the local high school is perpetrated by athletic elites in the defense of their own social privilege. The vast majority of rampage shootings, including those at Columbine, are retaliatory violence by the victims of such physical and psychological violence. If educators wish to stop the cycle of violence in American high schools, they have to begin at the top of the student status structure and provide students with the political, human, and physical resources to participate actively in the solution to the problem of violence.

Because a substantial proportion of high school violence is perpetrated by student elites associated with sports, the problem has been kept invisible. One of the major purposes of this study is to make the violence that is perpetrated by student elites visible. The first step in solving a problem is an accurate diagnosis.

For too long, the issue of rampage shootings in middle and high schools across this country has focused on individual pathologies to the detriment of contextual factors. In many cases, including Columbine, rampage shooters have demonstrated signs of personal pathology. It is entirely true that Dylan Klebold was depressed and Eric Harris had a serious personality disorder, most likely bipolar disorder. Yet it was not the disorders that caused the rampage shootings. Rather, it was the interplay between psychological factors and the social context that gave shape to their behavior.

Sadly, America prides itself on its violence. It has a whole mythology of gun-fighters that is especially predominant in the South and West where, not surprisingly, most middle and high school rampage shootings occur. America adheres to the cult of masculinity in which personal vulnerability is masked by violence. Within that cult, men are encouraged to avenge insults with physical and psychological violence in order to maintain their self-respect and image. Perhaps even more viciously, males are encouraged to demonstrate their dominance over others through violence and intimidation. This is clearly the *modus operandi* of the athletic elites. They defend their dominance and hegemony over the peer structure by erecting invisible walls between themselves and lesser males through intimidation, harassment, and violence. Once those boundaries are established, woes befall those who violate them. Wannabes, hangers on, and those who reject the status system in its entirety, usually at the bottom of the peer structure, are targeted because they either transgress the boundaries or call them into question.

Although not as physically violent, a parallel process occurs among adolescent women. The violence, although rarely physical, is every bit as vicious and psychologically debilitating to the victims. Instead of physical combat, barriers are maintained through gossip and shunning. For males, the criteria for elite membership are personal achievement, especially in sports, personal attractiveness, and social skills. For females, the criteria are family social status, physical attractiveness, and the status of males who will date them. It is still a sexist world, and female status is still attached to the status of the males they attract.

Adolescence is probably the time of life during which humans are involved in more competitive struggles than at any other time. In addition to the struggle for peer status, there are the associated struggles around sexuality and one's future. The lives of high school students are being sorted out. Who gets the awards, accolades, and recognition? Who gets the hot girl or guy? Who gets into the elite universities, and who ends up at the local community college? Who has a future, and who does not? All of these struggles pit teenagers against one another. One can be a winner in one arena and a loser in others. One can be a

football star, a loser with women, and a poor student. One of the enduring themes of American culture is the revenge of the nerd, the central themes of such diverse offerings as the movies “Heathers,” “The Revenge of the Nerds,” “Broadcast News,” “Election,” and the Bruce Springsteen song, “Glory Days.”

Historically, American culture has vacillated between dreams of domination and visions of utopias. The nineteenth-century vision of manifest destiny, realized, if necessary, through genocide, has expanded to fantasies of world domination. Americans have attempted to build intentional utopian communities from the nineteenth-century Mormons and Oneida communities to the communal movement of the late 1960s through the early 1970s. There is a strain in American culture that yearns for connectedness and living in harmony with ourselves, our community, our neighbors, and our environment. We cannot possibly achieve such harmony without acknowledgment and appreciation of human diversity. It is, therefore, necessary for us, as Americans, to develop human technologies that help us to live in harmony with others and resolve disputes and conflicts peacefully. There is no way we can do this without being able to put ourselves in the place of others. Without empathy, there can be no peace, only shortsighted self-interest. Schools are social institutions that, as their major function, teach people from different backgrounds to get along together. It is time that schools took this function seriously.

Some of us suffer for the sins of others. Sometimes innocents are slaughtered and the guilty die peacefully in their sleep blissfully unaware of the pain and suffering they have caused others. Surely this was the case with the following innocents:

Cassie Bernall
Steven Curnow
Corey DePooter
Kelly Fleming
Matthew Kechter
Daniel Mauser
Daniel Rohrbough
Rachel Scott
Isaiah Sholes
John Tomlin
Laura Townsend
Kyle Velasquez
William “Dave” Sanders

Although they have been memorialized, to this day, there has been no concerted effort to build a viable antiviolence program at Columbine High School worthy of their memory. As the famous antiwar song, “Where Have All the Flowers Gone,” asks, “When will they ever learn?”