

SCHOOL SAFETY POLICIES IN THE POST-COLUMBINE AGE

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Abstract

Despite their rarity, school shootings elicit strong emotional responses from the public. Following several high-profile shooting incidents, including the predominate Columbine High School massacre, a moral panic led to U.S. and Canadian school administrators, policymakers, and politicians taking severe steps to limit school violence and prevent similar incidents in the future. The steps taken ranged from “hard responses” based on zero tolerance policies that led to metal detectors and increased police/security presence in schools to school-wide anti-bullying programs and, more recently, to threat assessment protocols for at-risk students. Using social control theory, this analysis argues that, with the exception of threat assessment, previous policy attempts were unsuccessful due to their failure to establish and sustain the bonds students needed from their schools. Consequently, the author argues that threat assessment training should be increased across Canada and that teachers in training learn more about violence prevention at the undergraduate level.

Dedication

To Dr. Stuart O. Pierson, 1934-2001.

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Introduction

At approximately 11:19 a.m. on April 20, 1999, Columbine High School students Eric Harris, 18, and Dylan Klebold, 17, arrived at their high school in Littleton, Colorado, entered the building, and opened fire. They would eventually kill 12 of their fellow students and one teacher, while wounding more than 20 others before killing themselves in the school's library (Cullen, 2009). At the time, it was the worst school shooting incident in United States' history and would signal a seismic cultural shift in how educators and policymakers viewed school violence—specifically, how to prevent and respond to it.

Although not the first incident of severe school violence, at the time the Columbine killings resulted in far more media attention and government response than any school violence episode before (Killingbeck, 2001). Consequently, since its occurrence, “Columbine” has become a keyword for a complex set of emotions surrounding youth, risk, fear, and delinquency in 21st century America (Muschert, 2007).

It was not solely perceived as an American problem, however. Canadian policymakers and school administrators were motivated to act as a result of the media attention paid to Columbine, taking what some might perceive to be severe steps to improve safety amongst their students. The case for such measures were subsequently supported by shootings on Canadian school grounds, including at a high school in Taber, Alberta in 1999, at Dawson College in Montreal in 2006, and the Jordan Manners shooting in Toronto in 2007 (Paperny, 2012). As a result, many provinces took action. Manitoba revised its Public Schools Act and created an arm's-length body dedicated to ensuring the province's students were kept safe (Manitoba, 2017). In Quebec, non-negotiable disciplinary policies saw a 16-year-old expelled as recently as 2016 following a pocket

knife being absent-mindedly left in his school bag as he came to class (Hamilton, 2016).

Schools across Canada developed emergency plans, installed surveillance cameras, locked doors and improved scrutiny of visitors to schools property (Paperny, 2012).

Yet, despite the fear associated with violence in schools, empirical evidence indicates that schools are among the safest places for children. U.S. statistics showed that school crime nationally was relatively rare, declining, and usually nonviolent in nature (Dohrn, 2002; Jackson, 2002; Miller, Gibson, Ventura, & Schreck, 2005). School shootings like those in Littleton, however, fed growing public fear of juvenile and school crime. This led to the rapid implementation and expansion of numerous school security measures, ranging from the use of high-tech security devices like metal detectors and student-driven peer mentoring programs, school resource officer programs, and punitive zero-tolerance policies for disciplinary infractions (Eisenbraun, 2007)

The high level of media attention given to school shootings, compared to other forms of victimization in schools, is therefore quite misleading. Fatalities in schools are extremely rare: only about 1 in 2,000,000 school-age American youth will die from homicide or suicide at school each year. Less than 2 percent of homicides of school-age youth occur at school, and even as the public concern about school shootings peaked, the incidence of violent deaths in schools subsequently declined (Dinkes, Cataldi, Kena, Baum & Snyder, 2006).

Despite their infrequency, however, school-related shootings evoke strong public outcry. In the wake of Columbine and other shootings, there can be no doubt that schools, their administrators, and policy makers have the right, and indeed, the responsibility, to take strong action to preserve the safety of students, staff, and parents on school grounds.

In fact, schools have responded with a wide range of varying attempts to limit such incidents. This paper presents a theoretical discussion of school shooting causes and motivations, analyzes the successes and failures of policy responses in light of these theories, and presents some recommendations as to the steps that remain to be taken to prevent future acts of serious school violence.

The Historical Context of School Violence

Muschert (2007) defines five varieties of school-related shooting incidents that have occurred globally: rampage shootings, school-related mass murders, terrorist attacks on schools or school children, school-related targeted shootings, and government shootings taking place at schools. Due to their random nature and rapid loss of life, rampage shootings often attract considerable public attention. In the context of school attacks, he defines rampage shootings as expressive, non-targeted attacks—i.e., the perpetrators have little intent to target specific individuals.

Targeted school shootings are not random, and are generally not carried out for symbolic effect. An example is the 1992 gang-related shooting of a student at Tilden High School in Chicago (Muschert, 2007). This differs from terroristic school shootings, in which a school institution or students are selected as a symbolic target in a politically motivated attack. An example of this is the 1974 incident in Ma'alot, Israel, where three terrorists held students in an elementary school hostage, demanding the release of political prisoners. Before the attack ended, 25 people died, including 21 children (Muschert, 2007). However, terroristic school shootings differ from rampage school shootings due to the perpetrators having no previous connection with the school (Muschert, 2007). Government school shootings are also random, and carried out with the purpose of allegedly establishing peace

and order. A famous example is the 1970 shooting of four students by Ohio National Guard troops at Kent State University, as they protested the U.S. invasion of Cambodia during the Vietnam War (Muschert, 2007).

The final type of school shooting, mass school shootings, is the most similar to rampage school shootings. The main difference between those two types of shootings is that rampage school shooters have previously attended the school and are staging a symbolic attack on that school (Newman et al., 2004), while mass school shootings simply do not involve this connection. Muschert (2007) cites the 1927 case of a Bath, Michigan, farmer who killed his wife, blew up every building on their farm, following which he detonated explosives placed under the local school building, killing a total of 45 people.

Newman and colleagues (2004), however, argue a slightly different definition for rampage killing than Muschert (2007):

Rampage shootings are defined by the fact that they involve attacks on multiple parties, selected almost at random. The shooters may have a specific target to begin with, but they let loose with a fusillade that hits others, and it is not unusual for the perpetrator to be unaware of who has been shot until long after the fact. These explosions are attacks on whole institutions—schools, teenage pecking orders, or communities. (pp. 14-15)

Rampage school shootings can be distinguished from other types of school-related homicides, such as attacks resulting from conflicts between gangs or hostilities over drug dealings (Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta & Roth, 2004; Rocque, 2012). The motivations for rampage shootings are to attain power or to exact revenge on the community or large groups within the community. Muschert (2007) argues that the rampage shooter often equates their target schools with the communities where they are located, and the motivation for attacking the school can be understood as an attempt to attack the

community. Therefore, the Columbine event, which saw Klebold and Harris attempt to not just shoot classmates and teachers but also to blow up their school, is the archetypical case occurring in the U.S. (Mushcert, 2007).

According to Duplechain and Morris (2015), from 1760 until 2010 in the United States there were more than 310 documented shootings on school property (Table 1). However, the vast majority of these (190) occurred in the 24 year period between 1990 and 2014.

Table 1: Number of School Shootings between 1760 and 2014

Range	Number of Years	Number of Shootings
1760-1900	140 years	25
1900-1930	30 years	39
1930-1960	30 years	45
1960-1990	30 years	53
1990-2014	24 years	190

Since 2010, there have been at least 80 school shootings in the U.S., or an average of 20 school shootings per year from 2010 to 2014 (Duplechain & Morris, 2015). The number of deaths in these additional school shootings is 86. Even though violent deaths at U.S. schools account for less than 1% of the homicides and suicides among children ages 5 to 18 in the United States, these numbers are described by the authors as “shocking” (Duplechain & Morris, 2015, p.145), particularly given that they occurred in a setting where children are supposed to be safe from violence.

The Canadian experience has been markedly different. According to Statistics Canada (2014), while student-perpetrated violence in schools exists, it is not rampant, and rarely reaches this level of severity. One in ten police-reported crimes involving a youth accused occurred at school, with the most common being cannabis possession and common assault. 12 percent of criminal incidents involving at least one youth accused occurred on

school property. Violent crime (19 percent) and drug offences (27 percent) where a youth was accused were more likely to occur at school than property crimes, such as theft. Weapons (knives, firearms, or other weapons such as a club or blunt instrument) were slightly more likely to be present in violent incidents involving youth accused than those where no youth was involved (21 percent vs. 16 percent). Still, regardless of the age of the accused, very few criminal incidents in 2014 involved a firearm: a firearm was present in 2.8 percent of violent incidents involving at least one youth accused, and 1.5 percent of violent incidents involving only adult accused (Statistics Canada, 2014). Similarly, weapons were not present in most violent crimes occurring on school property in Canada, either during or after supervised hours. In 2014, three-quarters (77 percent) of violent incidents involving youth accused that took place on school grounds at any time involved physical force or threats; only 13 percent involved weapons (Statistics Canada, 2014). Further, these weapons were primarily knives or blunt instruments, and only 1 percent involved a firearm or firearm-like weapon.

Still, a review by Agnich (2011) established that the mid-1990's saw a rise in school violence worldwide. Akiba, LaTendre, and Baker (2002) also examined the cross-national incidence of school violence using a section of the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) survey data to: (a) explore the amount of school violence among the 37 nations in the study; (b) ascertain whether the traditional national-level predictors of crimes and delinquency explained cross-national variation in school violence; and (c) test whether factors related to the educational system are associated with levels of school violence cross-nationally.

The results showed that national patterns of school violence were not strongly related to general patterns of violence or lack of social integration in society (Akiba et al., 2005). Unexpectedly, the findings also demonstrated that students in countries such as New Zealand, Canada, Korea, Spain, and Australia actually reported higher rates of school violence than did students in the United States. Similarly, seventh and eighth graders in the U.S. reported fewer incidents of school violence than their global peers in 1995, although the U.S. had higher rates of juvenile violence outside of schools than many of these other countries did (Akiba et al., 2005).

While these studies may have identified lower rates of school violence in American schools compared to other countries around the world, certainly the violence that has occurred in American schools has been of a much more severe nature. Following several high profile examples of rampage shootings within American schools, including the Columbine attack in 1999, policymakers, politicians, and school officials were left to explore options on how to prevent future atrocities from taking place in their schools and to control what they – and the media – saw as the growing epidemic of violence in their institutions, leading to the introduction of brand new, often reactionary in nature, initiatives.

Before discussing these initiatives, it is important to note that the post-Columbine policy approach to school violence was strongly influenced by the moral panic the incident and other 1990s school shootings incited. As Ferguson, Coulson, and Barnett (2011) point out, however, mass homicides on academic settings were not a new phenomenon to the 1990s. Charles Whitman, the 25-year-old University of Texas sniper, killed 16 and wounded more than 30 in 1966, and numerous smaller incidents occurred both before and

after (United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education, 2002).

However, the 1990s saw an unusual string of such incidents, particularly those involving relatively young teen and even preteen shooters. In Ferguson et al.'s (2011) estimation, these incidents roughly began with the incident perpetrated by Gang Lu at the University of Iowa in 1991, who killed four faculty members and a student as a result of his displeasure with his dissertation mark, and concluded with at least five incidents in 1999, including the dominating case of Columbine, before dropping again to the previous rates (United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education, 2002).

Ferguson et al. (2011) concluded that this rash of school shootings in the U.S. took society by surprise, leading to fears of an epidemic of juvenile superpredators (Killingbeck, 2001; Muschert, 2007). These incidents led to strong demands for answers on why this rash of mass homicides among youth had occurred and how they could be prevented. The result was arguably a considerable amount of misinformation, challenges to research integrity, and well-intentioned but frequently misguided public policy (Ferguson et al., 2011).

The existing research regarding school shootings focuses primarily on attacks that occurred in the United States (Duwe, 2007; Muschert, 2007), and the few school shootings that have occurred in Canada have not been examined as extensively as those in the United States (Howells, 2012). However, while Canada has not suffered as many of these incidents as the United States, Gereluk, Donlevy and Thompson (2015) point out that this country has endured its own major instances of on-campus tragedy, including the misogynistic-oriented École Polytechnique shootings (Montreal, Quebec, 1989: 14 women dead, as well as the perpetrator), the more recent attacks at Dawson College (Montreal, Quebec, 2006:

one student dead, as well as the perpetrator) and W. R. Myers High School (Taber, Alberta, 1999: one student dead), as well as an armed hostage-taking in Luther College High School (Regina, Saskatchewan, 2008), which saw a former student hold a pastor at gunpoint in front of an assembly of 300 students who had gathered for chapel service (Gereluk et al., 2015).

Tait (2006) explains that school violence in Canada and the United States became an area of significant media and policy concern and led—mistakenly—to the implementation of several poor policy choices, especially zero tolerance discipline in schools. Tait (2006) laid the blame on the media, whose sensationalization of such incidents led to widespread fear among the public that schools were unsafe. Contrary to these perceptions, and crucial for understanding how to address school violence, it must be pointed out again that school-related homicides in Canada are actually extremely rare events (Statistics Canada, 2014). Yet, caught up in this moral panic, policymakers took what can now be seen as drastic and in many cases ineffective steps to addressing the problem of violence in schools. These steps often had little to no impact on improving safety for students and indeed may actually have had significant, long-term negative impacts on the lives of the students involved. Several of the attempts to prevent serious incidents of school violence can be described using the Broken Windows philosophy proposed by Wilson and Kelling (1982).

Broken Windows

Some of the “hard” approaches to preventing school violence, such as zero tolerance policies, metal detectors, and police presence in schools, trace their philosophical roots to James Q. Wilson and George Kelling. In 1982, Wilson and Kelling wrote an article for *The Atlantic* that outlined what came to be known as the “broken windows” theory of crime

(Wilson & Kelling, 1982). According to Kelling and Wilson, signs of disorder in a neighbourhood—such as dilapidated buildings, vandalism, or litter—can lead to much more serious crime in that same neighbourhood. The hypothesis underlying the theory is that signs of disorder in an area can undermine residents' ability to exert social control. The perceived lack of social control makes the neighbourhood attractive to other social disorder activities, such as public drinking and prostitution. In turn, this degraded environment is attractive to semi-commercial criminal enterprises, such as drug dealing, and further elevates the level of serious crime in the neighbourhood (Maguire, Morgan & Reiner, 2002; Sherman & Eck, 2002; Skogan, 1990). In other words, allowing a neighbourhood's smaller crimes to go unpunished promotes the further growth of social and physical disorder, and eventual criminal activity. This logic was applied to school settings, where underlying social tensions, such as bullying, the display of disrespect to teachers and fellow students, and classroom disruptions, were seen as laying the foundation for the development of serious violence.

Kelling and Wilson were not the first to point out the detrimental effects that disorder can have on communities, but they were the first to accuse disorder of being a cause of crime (Gau & Pratt, 2010). They hypothesized that even a single instance of disorder (the metaphorical "broken window") could spark a chain reaction of community decline if not fixed immediately (Wilson & Kelling, 1982; Skogan, 1990). This logic applied to everything from petty vandalism to aggressive panhandlers. They believed that failing to quickly address these instances of disorder helped to create and sustain a belief among community residents that all mechanisms of formal and informal social control had failed. Residents would then eventually lose control of their streets, parks, and other public spaces

to criminals who saw this lack of control as an invitation to “set up shop.” Small crime that goes unpunished will inevitably lead to bigger crimes as the message to criminals that residents will detect and report crime, and that police will then enforce the laws, is absent (Kelling & Wilson 1982).

The appeal of broken windows to school administrators is obvious. It demonstrates to the school’s community a commitment to act swiftly and decisively to not just violence, but to perceived violence—that is, the threat of violence. Finally, it proves their willingness to “get tough” on deviance in schools prior to such deviance escalating to episodes of serious violence, by sending the message that violence will not be tolerated.

However, some of the problems with broken windows in policing practice, such as racial profiling, the breeding of distrust between authorities and citizens, and discrimination against lower social-economic strata (Chauhan, Fera, Welsh, Balazon & Misshula, 2014), may also play out in schools. Rather than deter the escalation to serious violence, this may instead unintentionally contribute to it.

Policy Responses to School Violence

One reason these policies were quickly and often enthusiastically embraced without substantial empirical support can be traced back to the fear of administrators and policy-makers to be seen as doing nothing. In 1999 crime news jumped into second place on the list of broadcasts for ABC, NBC, and CBS. The Columbine High School shooting topped the list of crime stories covered on those evening broadcasts with 319 stories, more than five times the total of any other incident (Centre for Media and Public Affairs, 2000). Madfis (2015) argued that this led to the justification for and acquiescence to the expansion of punitive discipline and increased security presented in the guise of increasing school

safety. With the genuinely high potential cost of school massacres fused with an exaggerated perception of their likelihood and randomness, school rampage attacks came to be viewed as a risk that could not be tolerated and must be avoided at nearly any cost. The impact on policymaking was explained succinctly by one school administrator quoted by Madfis (2015, p. 49) who said, “[i]t’s better to overreact.” Consequently, many schools across North America adopted “hard” prevention tactics, including zero tolerance, metal detectors, and police presence in schools, despite the lack of evidence for their successful contributions to preventing school violence. Each of these policy examples will be discussed in more depth.

Zero Tolerance

Research into the effects of zero-tolerance policies (and the punishments they mete out) on a safe school climate is largely focused on American cases, since zero-tolerance policies in the U.S. predate their Canadian counterparts (Levinsky, 2016). The studies cited by Levinsky (2016) demonstrate the ineffectiveness of these disciplinary mechanisms and the disproportionate way they are applied to students from racial minorities, students with disabilities, students who are defined as being consistent behavioural problems, and lower class students (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2004; Morrison & D’Incau, 1997; Noguera, 1995; Skiba & Peterson, 1999, Verdugo, 2002). The Canadian literature on this topic is sparse, but the little that does exist reiterates the inequities that zero-tolerance policies produce and worsen in schools (Bhattacharjee, 2003).

An extension of this critique is that zero tolerance becomes a way for young people—particularly young people of colour—to ‘prepare for prison’ (Hirschfeld, 2008)

and strengthens the link between the justice system and the school (Kupchik & Monahan 2006). A zero tolerance discipline policy requires school officials to hand down specific, consistent, and harsh punishment, often in the form of suspension or expulsion, when students violate certain school rules, even if the violation was minor or unintended. The punishment applies regardless of the circumstances, the reasons for the behaviour (such as self-defense), or the student's history of discipline problems (Gjelten, 2017).

Zero tolerance policies in schools originated in the 1980s, inspired in part by the ongoing War On Drugs and the increasing shift to "get tough" law enforcement policy (Molsbee, 2008). According to Heitzeg (2009), zero tolerance rhetoric became widespread as school officials and community leaders expressed outrage at gang shootings and the impending wave of so-called "superpredators". Thus, despite school crime rates that were stable or declining, zero tolerance policies were widely implemented by the mid-1990s (Heitzeg, 2009).

The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (GFSA) provided the initial impetus for zero tolerance policies (Heitzeg, 2009). The GFSA mandated that any school receiving federal funding must have policies to expel for a calendar year any student who brings a firearm to school and to report that student to local law enforcement. This reduces any distinction between a school's disciplinary infractions and the law. This policy move coincided with the growing popularity of "broken windows" policing, a law enforcement approach that believed cracking down consistently on minor violations would prevent more serious crimes in the future (Gjelten 2017).

The rules varied from school to school, but they commonly required suspending or expelling students for a wide range of antisocial conduct. Gjeltén (2017) gives the following examples:

- bringing any weapon to school, including seemingly innocent items such as nail clippers and toy swords;
- having any alcohol or drugs on campus, including tobacco and over-the-counter medications such as aspirin;
- fighting, including minor scuffles;
- threatening other students or teachers, or saying anything that could be perceived as a threat;
- insubordination, which could include talking back to a teacher or swearing in the principal's office; and
- any behavior considered disruptive, such as cutting in a lunch line.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (2006), in many states 100 percent of school districts had prohibitions against weapons and fighting, nearly 80 percent had bans on gang-activity at school, and over 90 percent had implemented zero tolerance policies for alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.

Canada has also experimented with such policies in the past. In 2000, the Ontario Ministry of Education passed the Safe Schools Act (SSA), which set out a list of offences that could trigger expulsion, suspension, and other disciplinary responses, all in the name of safety. In a parallel move, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) adopted The Equity Foundation Statement in 1999, a comprehensive commitment to equity and a rally against racism, homophobia, sexism, and oppression based on class.

Levinsky (2016) contends that the push for “safer” schools in Ontario was due in part to Columbine as those pushing for it used the United States as an example. For

instance, Dan Newman, a Progressive Conservative backbencher and the first politician to propose the SSA, argued that the violence in U.S. schools must not be ignored just because it had not yet happened in Canada (Levinsky, 2016). Newman used the idea of “common sense” to assert that schools were becoming more violent without empirical support, and he further implied that without addressing school safety now, Canada would soon have similar “explosions” in school violence (Levinsky, 2016).

The new legislation took a more hardline approach in dealing with behaviour problems. The authority to suspend a student was provided to both principals and teachers. A principal had the power to suspend a student for up to twenty school days, while a teacher had the power to either suspend a student for one day or refer the matter to the principal. The authority to expel had also been expanded, with school boards and principals sharing that power (Levinsky, 2016).

A significant change was the provision for mandatory suspension and expulsion along with police involvement; in other words, cracking down on expressions of potential school violence with zero tolerance responses and a focus on criminalizing the issue. However, it also allowed for mitigating factors, whereby the suspension or expulsion of a student was not mandatory if: the pupil did not have the ability to control his or her behaviour, for instance, due to mental health reasons; the pupil did not have the ability to understand the foreseeable consequences of his or her behaviour, for instance, due to maturity; or the pupil's continuing presence in the school did not create an unacceptable risk to the safety of any person. The discretionary suspension or expulsion of a student was subsequently left to school board policies.

In 2007, the Ontario provincial government ultimately scrapped zero tolerance after considerable evidence emerged that it was unfairly targeting visible minority and low-income students (Puxley, 2007). In Nova Scotia, however, the approach was scrapped before implementation, thanks to research that proved its potential drawbacks (Bhattacharjee, 2003). Here, the provincial government ruled against the popularity of school zero-tolerance policies and instead took an evidence-based approach to the construction of school disciplinary policies. As in Ontario, Nova Scotia's Progressive Conservative Party promised zero tolerance disciplinary policy for violence and misbehavior in schools, and made it a platform promise of the 1999 provincial election (Bhattacharjee, 2003). Yet, Nova Scotia was the only province in Canada that collected and analyzed school board statistics on race and the application of discipline, and this data showed that racialized students were disproportionately affected by the use of suspensions and expulsions (Bhattacharjee, 2003). Consequently, the Nova Scotia School Conduct Committee recommended that zero tolerance policies not be adopted by Nova Scotia public schools due to the specific concern of its disproportionate effect on poor, marginalized, racialized, and special needs youth (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2000). The government accepted the recommendation.

In theory, zero-tolerance policies are intended to have a clear and beneficial deterrent effect for intentionally troublesome students, i.e. the mere presence of the policies is intended to prevent disruptive behavior. But, as with harsh penalties for juvenile and criminal justice, zero tolerance was adopted and expanded without significant data supporting either its effectiveness or need (Heitzeg, 2009).

There is also mounting evidence that these policies contribute to a “school to prison” pipeline. Zero tolerance led to a number of ongoing problems for students: denial of education through increased suspension and expulsion rates; referrals to inadequate alternative schools; lower test scores; higher dropout rates; and racial profiling of students. Once many of these children are in the criminal justice system, they can never recover. Schools may refuse to readmit them, and even if these students do return to school, they are often labeled and targeted for close monitoring by school staff and police (Heitzeg, 2009). As a result, many become demoralized and disengaged from the school environment, leading them to drop out and fall deeper and deeper into the youth and/or criminal justice systems (Advancement Project, 2005). Through zero tolerance, the consequences of child or adolescent behaviors may have a tragically long influence on their adult lives.

According to a report by the American Psychological Association (APA) (2008), schools are not any safer than before these zero tolerance policies were implemented. Of note, their research also argued that while school violence may be a serious issue, violence in schools was not out-of-control. Furthermore, this report suggested that zero tolerance policies do not increase the consistency of discipline in schools. Their research also shows that schools with higher rates of suspensions and expulsions have a poorer school culture, lower standards of governance, and devote too much time disciplining students. Rather than be a cause of misbehaviour, these trends could just as easily be a result of the harsh disciplinary responses to “acting out,” particularly given that the evidence shows that zero tolerance policies have increased the level of racial biases in disciplining students. The report found that a disproportionate number of students of colour are still overrepresented

in expulsions and suspensions, especially for African Americans but also for Latinos (APA, 2008).

Other research supports this. Increased suspensions and expulsions of students are having an extensive, negative influence not only on the student but also on his or her family, community, and society at large. The most frequently recognized effects are negative psychological effect, heightened feelings of isolation and abandonment at a time of a critical developmental stage (transition from youth and adulthood), loss of education, marginalization, limiting life opportunities, higher dropout rates, and increased criminalization and anti-social behaviour (Skiba et al, 2002; Bhattacharjee, 2003; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2004; Daniel & Bondi, 2008; Estidge, 2009; Lewis et al., 2010).

Despite the problems surrounding zero tolerance behavior policies in schools, media reports about school shootings, especially Columbine, created a further motivation for states and localities to add additional features, such as the increased use of metal detectors and a police presence at schools (Birkland & Lawrence 2009; Frymer 2009).

Metal Detectors

The earliest use of metal detectors being used in U.S. schools was in Detroit in 1985 (Anderson, Major, & Mitchell, 1995). New York and Chicago soon followed in 1987 (Anderson et al., 1995), with their use in New York being rapidly expanded following the shooting death of two students at Thomas Jefferson High School in 1992 (Medina, 2002). Following this shooting the Board of Education immediately approved a \$20-million plan to install metal detectors, x-rays, and electromagnetic doors at an additional 40 schools, vastly

expanding a program that had involved just 16 schools, usually those that were large and in the most crime-ridden areas of the city (Reyes & Ye, 2016).

Similarly, in 2007, a shooting at a Cleveland high school led to the installation of metal detectors in all 90 of that city's schools. Ominously, a Cleveland police officer inexplicably contended that "Canada would be next" (Brown, 2014). Today, however, few Canadian schools have metal detectors (Paperny, 2012). Instead, the focus for teachers and administrators is on planning for emergency scenarios. The director of Safe Schools Manitoba claimed that schools in that province are on "hyper-alert" and that the need for this preparation is now a "reflection of society" (Paperny, 2012)—but not enough, presumably, to embrace the use of metal detectors.

The use of metal detectors is the rarest intervention used by public schools to reduce school violence, with only 2 percent of students having to pass through them on a daily basis (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Random metal detector checks are only slightly higher, at 4.2 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). They remain a controversial measure for many reasons. For example, the increased scrutiny of students has raised concerns about the implications for students' rights and the culture of schooling in the United States, especially for low-income students and students of colour (Monahan & Torres, 2009).

Critiques of metal detectors have highlighted the consequences for low-income students and students of colour in the United States. Dickar (2008) argues that metal detectors drive a wedge between students of colour and their communities, signaling to these students that they are different and unwelcome, as the use of metal detectors is higher in schools with larger proportion of students of colour. Gastic (2015) argues that

even if metal detectors may be an important part in managing the presence of weapons in schools, their disproportionate use in majority-minority schools suggests that student demographics may influence—whether consciously or not—educational leaders’ decisions to implement an extreme form of student control.

According to Gastic (2015) metal detectors are intended to reduce students’ weapon-carrying behavior by representing a public formal mechanism by which students are given the opportunity to change their behaviour in light of the disciplinary consequences associated with bringing weapons to school. Requiring that students be searched via metal detectors makes weapon-carrying more visible, therefore increasing the chances that students who carry weapons to school will be disciplined. As a result of this increased risk, most students will likely decide to change their behavior (i.e., stop bringing weapons to school). However, metal detectors may also yield insight into the extent of a school safety problem by producing a short-term increase in the number of confiscated weapons through enhanced screening protocols (Gastic, 2015).

Hankin, Hertz, and Simon (2011) conducted an extensive review of the research into metal detector effectiveness in reducing school violence. Each of the studies reviewed utilized data that originated from self-report surveys focusing on a range of student/staff perceptions of safety at school and student self-reports of weapon carrying and/or victimization. The findings showed mixed results. While Hankin et al. (2011) established that there was some evidence that lower rates of weapon carrying were reported by students attending schools with metal detectors, she acknowledged that the implications of this finding were limited, given that the authors did not evaluate the association between metal detector use and weapon-related outcomes, such as rates of gun violence and

weapon-related injuries. Troublingly, a sizeable proportion of students in schools with metal detectors (7.8 percent) still reported carrying a weapon in school and students in these schools were at equal risk of threats and fights as students in schools without metal detectors. This indicates that the students most intent on using a weapon to threaten or injure another person may be undeterred by the presence of metal detectors. Moreover, a study of middle and high school students showed that in schools with principals reporting an average level of student problems, the presence of metal detectors was actually associated with lower student perceptions of safety, rather than enhanced feelings of safety (Gastic, 2006).

Mayer and Leone (1999) determined that higher levels of school security measures (including metal detectors and guards) were actually associated with increased school disorder (including violence and perceived disruption). Their model suggests that a higher level of disorder is associated with and may actually result from more efforts to control school premises in a highly restrictive manner. Alternatively, their research may point to a cycle of disorder where the restrictive control of the premises and disorder demonstrate a reciprocal, destructive relationship. The model also demonstrates that where more disorder exists, students tend to engage in more acts of self-protection and live in a heightened state of fear (Mayer and Leone, 1999).

Garcia's work (2003) indicated that only 32 percent of school safety administrators believed that metal detectors were either "effective" or "very effective" for reducing violent crime at school. Based on this, Hankin et al. (1999) argues that students and staff may respond to metal detectors in unpredictable ways. They might perceive the metal detector program as an indication that students are carrying weapons to which they may

potentially react with heightened feelings of vulnerability or aggression—a strange and wholly unintended consequence of the broken windows reasoning.

Thus, several studies suggested that in contrast to their goal, metal detectors had potential detrimental effects on student perceptions of safety. Gastic (2011) argued that detectors led to a heightened sense of fear and anxiety amongst students, and were negatively correlated with students' sense of safety at school, net of the level of violence at school. In contrast, a different study showed a significant beneficial effect, linking metal detector use to a decreased likelihood that students reported carrying a weapon while in school (7.8 percent vs. 13.8 percent), without a change in weapon carrying in other settings or a decline in participation in physical altercations.

Further, there is evidence that metal detectors are inherently flawed in stopping the gun violence that led to their wider-spread adoption. Ken Trump, a security expert who has advised schools on limiting violence, points out that there are several flaws in metal detectors as a viable policy and insists they are a knee-jerk reaction rather than a measured, viable attempt to control guns in classrooms (Steele, 2015). For instance, he argues that schools have limited time and resources, and therefore often cannot guarantee a metal detector is always used whenever anyone has access to the school. Further, they are not cost effective, diverting thousands of dollars away from school budgets that could easily be put to better use, such as designing interventions for troubled students (Steele, 2015). Finally, they may provide a mere false sense of security. As an example, a 2005 spree killing in Red Lake, Minnesota, saw ten people dead, including seven students. The school had fences, security presence, and metal detectors. The gunman killed a security guard manning the detector, leading the other guard to flee the scene. (Steele, 2015;

Enger, 2015). It stands to reason that a rampage killer set on opening fire upon victims in any building will not be deterred by a metal detector or a pat down upon entering. He or she will simply open fire and fight their way in.

Police In Schools

The third policy response to school shootings involved regularly locating police officers directly in schools. The idea of police officers being in schools originated in the United States, where the perception of escalated levels of school violence led directly to the introduction of police presence in schools, especially following high profile school shootings, such as Columbine. Of note, the policy existed prior to 1999. As of 1991, enough school resource officers were in the field that a specialized police association the National Association of School Resource Officers, was founded. By 1997 (two years before Columbine), there were already an estimated 12,300 school resource officers on U.S. school grounds, according to the Congressional Research Service (Glenza, 2015).

Presently in North America, the School Resource Officer (SRO), a program that sees police placed in school to regularly interact with students and staff, remains popular and appears under several names. For example, the West Vancouver Police Department has referred to SROs as Youth Liaison or Youth Contact Officers, while several RCMP detachments operate positions for School Liaison Officers. These uniformed officers are specifically assigned to schools to have a presence there. There is, however, no consistency around how this role is defined and the responsibilities tend to differ depending on the school as well as the individual police agency or officer (Abramson, 2009).

Johnson (1999) explains the multiple roles Resource Officers fulfill. These included checking students' identification to minimize the number of trespassers coming into the school, checking exterior doors to make sure that they were locked, immediately intervening in a potential violent or dangerous situation involving students such as a fight, drug possession, or gang identification, and, more often in the case of a liaison officer, establishing a trusting and respectful relationship with students so that students would be willing to inform authorities about a potential dangerous situation before it occurred. From this list, it is simple to see some areas of potential conflict between police performing enforcement related duties while at the same time trying to build rapport with students. Without clearly defined and understood roles, it is easy for police to be given multiple and competing tasks which is troubling for the entire school community.

In the U.S., the model of choice for public school safety has been the policing model (Abramson, 2009). Theriot (2009), however, argues that the massive increases in security measures, such as police presence in schools, is not justified by the rates of violent incidents as national school-based crime rates were declining and when events do occur they are typically non-violent in nature. In addition, he argues that criminalizing students' behaviour through the use of police-based models has led to an increase in the number of youth charged with criminal offenses and, thus, the labeling and stigmatizing of more and more young people—a continuing consequence of zero tolerance policies. This is a direct result of issues that were traditionally handled internally by school staff now moving into the criminal justice system, which can have negative and longer lasting implications on students and families.

Theriot (2009) also points out that research on the effectiveness of police and security measures in schools is inconclusive. Consistent with zero tolerance consequences, some studies suggest that these measures can actually increase school disorder and lead to an adversarial relationship between school staff and students. Gastic (2006) has noted that while these measures might decrease actual incidents of violence, the impact on student attitudes and perceptions of safety has been negative.

Further, when police come to work in schools with an enforcement response rather than a problem-solving approach, they run the risk of pushing more youth into the criminal justice system (Abramson, 2009). This disconnect between building trusting relationships with youth on one hand and gathering information in order to arrest a youth on the other can lead to mixed messages to students that jeopardize any chance in building constructive, adult-student relationships. While this dual role of police may be unavoidable, Abramson urges that clarity must exist amongst all stakeholders so that the expectations, roles and responsibilities are clear to all involved (Abramson, 2009).

Na and Godfredson (2011) studied the effects of police in schools by comparing schools that increased their use of police during the study period to a comparison group of schools that did not, and by relying on principal reports of actual crimes rather than on perceptions of the effectiveness of SRO officers. Their study found no evidence suggesting that the presence of law-enforcement officers in schools contributes to student safety. i.e. for no crime type was an increase in the presence of police significantly related to decreased crime rates. They did, however, note that having police in schools did not negatively impact students in terms of suspensions and expulsions, nor was there any

evidence of adverse impact of police officer presence on minority groups or on special education populations.

Further, Na and Godfredson (2011) argued that the evidence suggests that *more* crimes involving weapons possession and drugs are recorded in schools that add police officers than in similar schools that do not. Their conclusions are consistent with Kupich (2010) and demonstrate that the presence of police officers helps to redefine disciplinary situations as criminal justice problems rather than social, psychological, or academic problems, therefore increasing the likelihood that students are arrested at school. Adding police, however, does not increase the reporting of serious violent crimes or crimes involving weapons and drugs to law enforcement.

In Canada, police involvement in school life became a fixture after an Ontario school homicide. In 2007, student Jordan Manners was shot and killed at C.W. Jefferys Collegiate in Toronto. The shooting, while not a Columbine-style rampage killing, led to similar post-event reactions in many Ontario schools, i.e. the introduction of police in the hallways and security cameras through the schools (Brown, 2014). Early press coverage was positive, touting the immediate improvement of student behaviour and the reduction in suspensions and expulsions. Tanner (2010), however, argues that there are other factors that may explain these outcomes, including that a lecture or “dressing down” from a police officer now substituted for suspension or expulsion. Tanner (2010) also pointed out that there may be further unintended consequences to this move, including the long-term negative impact of students now seeing their school as a potential crime scene as opposed to an institution of learning.

The current body of research on the effectiveness of SRO programs is limited, both in terms of the number of studies published and the methodological rigor of the studies conducted (James & MacAllion, 2013). The research that is available reaches differing conclusions regarding SRO programs' effectiveness in reducing school violence. Finally, the research does not address whether SRO programs deter school shootings, one of the key reasons for renewed funding of these programs (James & MacAllion, 2013). It is worthwhile mentioning, however, that there was an armed police officer at Columbine in 1999 (Terkel, 2012). The officer on the scene, a 15-year veteran, exchanged shots with Eric Harris but was unsuccessful in stopping him.

Anti-Bullying Strategies

Not all approaches to curbing school violence and preventing extreme incidents such as rampage shootings have relied on physical surveillance and deterrence such as those previously discussed. Following Columbine, there was considerable discussion and debate about bullying in schools and the role it played as a possible precursor to both what happened in Littleton and other school shootings (Langman, 2009; Greif & Furlong, 2006; O'Toole, 1999). The accepted wisdom was that bullying at school was the explanation for school shootings (Newman et al., 2004). Nansel and colleagues (2001) found that those who were bullied demonstrated poor social and emotional adjustment skills, and experienced greater difficulty making friends, and maintaining relationships with peers, ultimately leading to increased loneliness. As a result, children who lacked social skills, were socially isolated and perceived as being "weird" were more likely to be targeted for bullies (Reuter-Rice, 2008; Lebrun, 2008).

The definition of school bullying includes several key elements: a physical, verbal, or psychological attack or intimidation that is intended to cause fear, distress, or harm to the victim; an imbalance of power (psychological or physical), with a more powerful child (or children) oppressing less powerful ones; and repeated incidents between the same children over a prolonged period (Olweus, 1993). It is not bullying when two persons of the same strength (physical, psychological, or verbal) victimize each other (Farrington, 1993). School bullying can occur in school or on the way to or from school.

Bullying is used as an explanation for school shootings in that this model proposes that students would want to attack their fellow classmates because they have been consistently and ruthlessly tormented by these peers (Rocque, 2012; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). This is in fact supported by some previous research that demonstrates that a majority of school shooters, including those at Columbine, were victims of bullying and mistreatment (Newman et al., 2004; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). Vossekuil and colleagues (2002) further argued that bullying and constant harassment may lead to feelings of deep-rooted frustration, which in turn may lead to a student taking up arms against his or her classmates.

Perpetrators of bullying evidence poorer psychological adjustment than individuals not involved in bullying (Kumpulainen, Raesaenen, & Henttonen, 1999; Nansel et al., 2001). Children who bully tend to be involved in deviant behavior, such as alcohol consumption and smoking, have poorer academic records than noninvolved students, display a strong need for dominance, and show little empathy for their victims (Roberts & Morotti, 2000). Bullying may be a means of increasing one's social status and access to valued resources, such as the attention of opposite-sex peers (Pellegrini, 2001). Further, parents and home

environments can promote bullying (Smith & Myron-Wilson, 1998). Children who bully tend to come from homes where aggression is a favoured problem-solving method, negative emotional attitudes are common, and the children are encouraged to fight back when harassed (Glover, 2000; Roberts & Morotti, 2000).

In contrast, victims of bullying tend to be socially isolated with poor social skills, anxiety problems, and low self-esteem (Olweus, 1997). They are also likely to have a higher than normal risk for depression and suicide (Sourander, Helstelae, Helenius, & Piha, 2000). Interestingly, a subgroup of bullying victims reacts aggressively to abuse. They exhibit a pattern of psychosocial maladjustment that includes both the antisocial behaviour of bullies and the social and emotional difficulties of victims (Glover, Gough, Johnson, & Cartwright, 2000).

The possible link between bullying victim and potential school shooter would appear to be clear. Langman (2014), however, argued that the connection between bullying and school violence is elusive. He studied 48 school shooting perpetrators and found that many shooters were never consistently picked on and there was no discernable pattern of harassment. Of the 48 shooters studied, he estimated that approximately 40 percent experienced some kind of bullying—meaning that approximately 60 percent did not. Further, he disputed the widely held contention that school shooters seek out revenge against their tormentors. Out of 48 shooters, only one shooter tracked down and killed a boy who reportedly had picked on him. Further, this case is ambiguous because the perpetrator, Evan Ramsey, originally simply planned to kill himself before two friends urged him to kill others.

Langman's review reveals a different pattern: school staff and females were the most frequently targeted groups. In some cases, the perpetrators targeted specific individuals they knew, such as an ex-girlfriend. In other cases, females as a group were targeted. In Langman's view, shooters are far more likely to lash out at girls who rejected them or teachers they disliked rather than peers who bullied them. Finally, what is often missed in discussions about bullying and school shootings is that shooters are often bullies themselves. Specifically, in Langman's research, 54 percent of perpetrators harassed, intimidated, threatened, or assaulted others prior to their attack (Langman, 2014). Therefore, the connection between bullying and school shootings is elusive. A pattern of harassment may contribute to perpetrators' rage and/or depression; however, it is but one factor among many that cause rampage attacks (Langman, 2014).

Nansel and colleagues (2003) also argued that the link between bullying and violence is difficult to establish. Their study surveyed 15,000 students who participated in the Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey, an American nationally representative survey of youth in grades 6 through 10 in public, Catholic, and other private schools during the spring of 1998. Their results showed that violence-related behaviors were uncommon, but that when they occurred they were more common among boys (ranging from 13 percent to 27 percent among those who reported each behavior) than girls (ranging from 4 percent to 11 percent).

Crucially, while the Nansel et al. (2003) study did not conclude that the victims of bullying were the youth most likely to be dangerous, it did establish that victims are more likely than youth who have never been bullied to feel that violence is a solution to their problems. In fact, they argued that the youth most likely to carry a weapon reported being

bullied away from school. Further, they were also likely to report bullying others themselves. Moreover, the youth who were sometimes bullied in and away from school, and who also bullied others away from school weekly, were 16 times more likely to carry a weapon than students who were neither a bully or a victim (Nansel et al., 2003).

It was widely reported that the Columbine shooters were frequent targets of bullying victimization perpetrated by the school's football players, leading to the implementation of various anti-bullying programs in schools worldwide (Crary, 2010; Garbarino, 2004). The focus since evolved to improving student connections to and bonding with a school by improving school climate and culture, while also providing protection for targeted students, and effective responses to peer aggression. This is consistent with the aims and goals of the "whole school approach" to tackling bullying, which continues to be very popular in schools across North America.

The whole school approach is based on the assumption that bullying is a systemic problem and that programs must address the problem at all levels of school life (Smith, Cousins & Stewart, 2005). The Olweus Bullying Prevention program (Olweus, 1993) was the first comprehensive whole-school program implemented on a large scale and most programs dedicated to whole-school approach share its core features (Smith, Cousins & Stewart, 2005). The features of this policy include:

- School-wide activities, such as establishing an anti-bullying policy;
- Increased adult supervision on school grounds;
- Establishment of an anti-bullying committee;
- Behaviour codes;
- In-class anti-bullying activities/learning;

- Engaging and informing parents of anti-bullying practices;
- Establishing peer-helpers for victims; and
- Targeted interventions for children directly involved in bully/victim problems.

A positive aspect of the whole-school approach is that it avoids the stigmatization that can occur when individual students are singled out and labeled. It also avoids the negative effects that have been shown when aggressive children are brought together in a group for treatment, which can lead to aggressive children teaching each other new forms of aggression and encouraging misbehavior (Smith, Schneider, & Ananiadou, 2004).

This approach is in use in Canada. Its appeal can be summarized through the Government of Ontario, who published a “tip sheet” on the philosophy in 2012:

It is important to engage all key learning areas, all grades and the wider community. All aspects of school life are included in a whole school approach, such as curriculum, culture, teaching practices, policies and procedures. To bring about a cultural change in schools, it is necessary that adults in the school and the wider community develop awareness and understanding of behaviour issues in their school.

The Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth’s policy paper, “A Whole-School Approach to Safety and Belonging: Preventing Violence and Bullying” (2005) takes a similar view, and also stressed the need for a change in school “climate” as being crucial to safety:

Most importantly, the whole-school approach to safety and belonging focuses on a climate in which students learn best and on the motivations behind behaviour. Based on information gleaned from data collected from the unique school context and using positive learning and restitution-based models, the whole-school approach offers meaningful involvement for students, parents, and school staff in contributing to a safe and caring school community.

British Columbia has embraced the whole school approach to bullying prevention as part of its Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools (2003, updated 2008) program. The plan explains the provincial standards for codes of conduct, and identifies attributes of safe, caring, and orderly schools. It also explains its strategies for informing appropriate members of the school community of safety concerns in a timely manner. For example, when serious misconduct occurs, an individual's right to privacy is balanced with the needs of the school community to know that school officials are aware of the incident and are taking suitable steps to address it. Features of the Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools protocol include developing a welcoming school culture, plus a shared commitment to maintaining safe schools with a focus on preventing problems. Schools are expected to build communities that foster respect, inclusion, fairness, and equity. These school communities set and reinforce clear expectations of acceptable conduct to their students. The goal is to plan for things to "go right" but to be ready to respond appropriately if or when things "go wrong." Expectations about acceptable behaviour, respect and decorum are understood. Responses to violations are based consistently on sound principles and, unlike zero tolerance, are appropriate to the context

In short, the whole school approach sees a problem such as bullying as a complex social issue that requires almost total school involvement to prevent and to solve. It recognizes that the issue is one that the schools cannot battle alone (Pepler, 2008). It requires engaging not only everyone in the school but also external community stakeholders and concerned parties, including parents.

However, the results of the whole school approach and other similar strategies to combat bullying have been inconsistent. In a meta-analytic study carried out by Ferguson,

San Miguel, Kilburn, Sanchez and Sanchez (2007), it was concluded that school-based anti-bullying programs were not useful in reducing bullying or violent student behaviors in schools. Further, Richard's (2011) review revealed that whole-school interventions designed to combat bullying have had, at best, limited success. Finally, Smith and colleagues' (2004) meta-analysis on school bullying interventions concluded that although some intervention studies yielded positive outcomes, the majority of programs evaluated yielded no significant outcomes in regards to self-reported victimization and bullying.

While Smith et al. (2004) were reluctant to call an end to school-based approaches, lauding their ambitious goals to foster peaceful learning environments, the evidence to support them is difficult to justify based on their results. Looking at changes in the intervention from pre-test to post-test, 93 percent of programs yielded negligible or even negative results for reducing bullying amongst children. For self-reported bullying, 100 percent of the effects were negligible or negative.

Smith (2011) has several possible explanations for these inconsistencies. One is that Olweus's high success relates to the high quality of Scandinavian schools, which have small classes and well-trained teachers, together with the well-ingrained Scandinavian tradition of state intervention in matters of social welfare. Further, the success of the Olweus program may be related in part to its historical context, perhaps making it a unique and unreplicable case. The program was introduced into schools nation-wide following several highly publicized suicides that were linked publicly to bullying (Olweus, 1993). It seems plausible that this could have increased the commitment with which school officials and students invested themselves in the program.

Smith (2011) also offers another interpretation: The inconsistent results reflect a reasonable rate of return on the investment to the program. The possibility that Olweus created a unique package of intervention components that is ineffective when diluted or modified cannot be ruled out. Most of the studies Smith reviewed have entailed substantial modifications to the original program. Although such changes may be justified, it could leave school professionals unable to replicate the interventions with fidelity.

Threat Assessment

A more recent response adopted by schools in North America has been the Threat Assessment approach. Within schools, threat assessment is a group process used to evaluate the risk posed by a student, typically as a response to a possible or actual threat or troubling behavior (Vossekuil et al., 2002). In this process, school staff, including teachers, psychologists and counselors, become educated about the precursors to violence and, crucially, become familiar with the range of interventions that can help prevent it from occurring. It also presents itself as part of an overall approach to positive school culture, including bonding between school personnel—much like Olweus’ anti-bullying strategies. According to Fein and colleagues (2004):

In a climate of safety, students have a positive connection to at least one adult in authority. Each student feels that there is an adult to whom he or she can turn for support and advice if things get tough, and with whom that student can share his or her concerns openly and without fear of shame or reprisal. Schools in which students feel able to talk to teachers, deans, secretaries, coaches, custodians, counselors, nurses, school safety officers, bus drivers, principals, and other staff support communication between students and adults about concerns and problems (12).

The threat assessment approach has gained wide support for preventing violence not only in schools, but also in workplaces and communities. The U.S. Secret Service, FBI and U.S. Department of Education have all recommended that K–12 schools implement threat assessment teams (Miller, 2014). In this model, members of the threat assessment team undergo training and certification to become threat assessment “experts”; then, should an incident suggest a developing threat, the team comes together to share information, perform the assessment of the threat, and design a case management strategy to minimize the likelihood that violence will occur. The American National Standards Institute has also endorsed the use of threat assessment in universities in 2010 and workplaces in 2011 (Miller, 2014).

Common themes among perpetrators of school violence include experiencing a loss, failure, or public humiliation in the period before the attack (Vossekuil et al., 2002). Ultimately, if a person lacks the ability to cope with life stress in a healthy manner, a small number of them will eventually believe that violence is the solution. Threat assessment teams are trained to recognize these and other signs of distress and to develop interventions to prevent them from escalating to violence.

Specifically, threat assessment is a behaviour-based and deductive process (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998). Threat assessment has four components: (a) learning of a person who may pose a threat; (b) gathering information about that person from multiple sources; (c) evaluating whether the person poses a threat of violence to others; and (d) developing and implementing an individualized plan to reduce any threat (Randazao & Cameron, 2012). The assessor or assessment team makes an evaluation first by answering several investigative questions about the person’s ideas, plans, and capacity to do harm to an

identified or identifiable target, and then using that information to determine whether the person poses a threat, i.e. does the person have the intent to harm someone and the capacity to do so (Borum, Fein, Vossekuil, & Berglund, 1999). The threat assessment process focuses on the behavior and communications of the person in question and what conclusions can be drawn from those facts regarding the person's ideas, plans, and capacity to do harm (Randazzo & Cameron, 2012).

While threat assessment is popular in the United States, it is also growing in Canada, having been well-established in schools in Ontario and B.C. and continuing to be implemented in other provinces, including Saskatchewan (CBC, 2016). Canadian schools adapted the threat assessment principles of the U.S. Secret Service to create the Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) Model, developed by the RCMP Behavioural Sciences Unit. VTRA is a more general protocol to evaluate the risk of any serious school violence—not just a potential school shooting (Randazzo & Cameron, 2012).

Threat assessment has been growing in popularity, possibly as it enjoys the benefit of not being tied to specific sociological or psychological explanations of deviance. It faces, however, a considerable challenge within the population it seeks to protect. Although the need to gather information about a student who may pose a threat of violence is clear, the ability to share this information may not always be in place. For example, many schools limit access to student records. In creating information-sharing policies, threat assessment teams (which include school staff and other community members) must liaise with their respective school's or school district's to ensure that team members are well-briefed on existing laws and regulations around what information can be shared, when, and with

whom, and their implications for the development of policies and procedures for accessing and disclosing student information (Fein et al., 2004).

In Canada, however, the Supreme Court (1998) has established legal precedent by ruling [in *R. versus M (M.R.)*] that in certain situations, the need to protect the greater student population superseded the individual rights of the student. The ruling explicitly acknowledges that school officials must be able to act quickly and effectively to ensure the safety of the students and to prevent serious violations of the school rules. This ruling appears in many Canadian school threat assessment policies, including School District 71—Comox Valley, British Columbia (Stewart, 2011).

Due to the recent growth and acceptance of threat assessment as a viable policy option in predicting and controlling extreme violent student behavior, there is not enough empirical research available to fully establish its effectiveness at preventing severe school violence. However, Cornell, Sheras, Gregory and Fan (2009) have concluded that the schools they studied where threat assessment guidelines were in place reported less bullying, a greater willingness by the students to seek help, and more positive perceptions of the school climate than schools without those guidelines. Further, Nekvasil and Cornell (2015) investigated threat assessment impact in middle schools and found it to promote better school culture and lower levels of student aggression.

Finally, threat assessment may be uniquely placed to work in schools, as the potential perpetrators are part of the contained school community. Since the evidence is overwhelming that there were many warning signs ahead of school shootings such as at Columbine (Langman, 2014), the threat assessment approach lays out a clear path of action for members of the school community to take when one of those signs is recognized.

Explaining the Failure of School Violence Policies: Social Control Theory

It is clear from the above discussion that many of the policies introduced in response to incidents of serious school violence were reactionary in nature, not based on the evidence of what works, and in many cases, a failure. Travis Hirschi's theory of social control provides a useful theoretical framework to understand the failures of many of these harsh responses to serious school violence.

Hirschi's social control theory (1969, 1977) relied on the four elements of a social bond to explain why some juveniles resort to delinquency: (1) attachment; (2) commitment; (3) involvement; and (4) beliefs. Intrinsic to Hirschi's (1969, 1977) theory of social control is the assumption that persons will engage in delinquent behavior when their "social bond" to society is weakened.

According to Hirschi (1969), individuals with strong and stable attachments to other people within society are less likely to violate societal norms. Conversely, an individual with weak attachments is assumed to be unconcerned about what others may think of them, and therefore more prone to deviate from society's expectations.

Commitment refers to the investment an individual has in social activities and institutions (Hirschi, 1969). Hirschi's commitment construct is based on the premise that there is an association between level of commitment and propensity for deviance. Thus, an individual who has invested time, energy, and resources into conforming to social norms and expectations (e.g., pursuing educational goals) are less likely to deviate than someone who has not made such an investment.

Involvement is the third element of Hirschi's (1969) concept of social bonding. Hirschi argued that large amounts of structured time devoted to socially approved activities cuts into "free time" that would otherwise be available for deviant behavior. Thus, an individual who is actively engaged in conventional pursuits (e.g., employment) simply has less time and opportunity to engage in deviant activities.

Hirschi's (1969) final element of social bonding relates to an individual's level of belief in the moral validity of shared social values and norms. Hirschi suggested that persons who strongly believe in these norms are less likely to deviate from them. However, those who question or challenge the norms have a greater propensity to behave in a deviant manner.

The theory of social control can be applied to explain the failure of zero tolerance policies in preventing school violence, as zero tolerance school policies do not allow students to form the bonds Hirschi believes are necessary to reduce attraction to deviant behavior. Rather, the harsh, punitive measures that are unilaterally applied to address a wide range of behavioral indiscretions leave students doubting the moral validity of their school. Further, punishment being meted out without discretion from the leaders of the school means the authority figures are not seen as individuals capable of making their own judgments, but instead unaccountable automatons of authority. In this environment, students are not individuals that the school cares about—they are all "the same," regardless of their motivations for breaking the rules. Further, it must also be added that school administrators are not powerless in their schools when it comes to enforcing zero tolerance policies. Indeed, many embraced them and their prescribed liberal use of

suspensions and expulsion as a way to remove difficult students (Martinez, 2010). This further delegitimizes them in the eyes of the students who remain.

Moreover, in this environment, students see peers banished from school without consideration for their futures. This may prevent them from psychologically engaging with their school, as they may fear themselves being one day torn away from this environment. Similarly, a school that monitors the student through metal detectors (or cameras) does not encourage students to trust their learning environment. Likewise, police presence in a school that is not clearly defined and possibly confusing to the student, e.g. “Is this police officer here to support me or to punish me?”

These examples illustrate the key failure of zero tolerance policies in combatting school violence. It presupposes the guilt of the students they allegedly seek to protect. They do not, in any way, foster a young person’s sense of pride or loyalty to his or her school. A student who does not feel safe or even the possibility of being trusted in his or her school will not see that school as a haven or even a pleasant place to learn. He or she will see it as a prison—which, for some policymakers, might have been the point.

Bullying policies implemented to address school violence have also struggled to prove consistently effective. There have been many studies dedicated to identifying who is most at risk to become a bully. Findings have been mostly inconsistent up to this point but the most common contributors were found to be exposure to parental anger, domestic violence, lack of confidence, feelings of shame and displacement, poor role modeling, child maltreatment, and poor peer relations. (Pontzer, 2009). It is very difficult for a school to address many of these issues in a child’s life. Even if the school attempts to establish attachment to the school for the student through anti-bullying policies, they ignore the very

real attachment the bully has to his or her peers and the sense of power bullying awards that Olweus himself acknowledged (1993). If a child is struggling outside of school and receiving validation from a peer group that champions strength and power through bullying, school programs urging peace and moderation will likely be ineffectual.

The research demonstrates that the child's life outside of school has a significant effect on his or her propensity for deviant behavior (Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Conger 1991). Parents play a significant role in helping the child to understand the norms and create bonds within their school. Parents teach their children the prosocial behaviors accepted in these facilities, such as being polite, helpful, and considerate. If, however, parental attachment is low, they will not learn these behaviors, and their school life will be far more difficult (Simons et al., 1991). No matter how well-intentioned, a school simply cannot, for example, repair broken bonds between a parent and their child.

It has also been widely substantiated that children who turn to bullying are heavily influenced by their intense desire to be accepted by their peers; primarily, other children who bully (Olthof & Goossens, 2007). This motivates them to behave in specific ways in order to elicit the bullies' acceptance, often leading to future anti-social behavior (Olthof & Goossens, 2007). A school's attempts to reduce bullying would pale in effectiveness next to a child's strong desire to 'fit in' with a peer group he or she respects. The student is seeking a strong attachment—it is just not with the school.

Finally, the literature generally considers school victims to be bullied by peers. However, it has been established that some trauma to students in schools involves teachers and other school personnel (Hyman & Snook, 2000). Twemlow's surveying of U.S. teachers (2006) showed that 45 percent admitted to having bullied a student. Obviously, any school

that is urging students to stand up against bullying has no moral authority if its own staff is bullying students. This erosion of moral authority would further negate the bond between student and school. As Hirschi would argue, the student has no reason to believe in the school, and therefore deviant behavior will follow.

Threat assessment policy, while not without some of these problems, has shown considerable promise in identifying risk and addressing it. As discussed, there is a limit of empirical evidence to establish its current effectiveness but the early signs are encouraging. For example, Cornell, Sheras, Gregory and Fan (2009) have concluded that the schools they studied with threat assessment guidelines reported less bullying, greater willingness to seek help, and more positive perceptions of the school climate than schools without those guidelines. Further, Nekvasil and Cornell (2015) investigated threat assessment impact in middle schools and found it promoted better school culture and lower levels of student aggression.

Studies have indicated that targeted violence is the end result of an understandable and often discernible process of thinking and behaviour (Secret Service, 2001). Specifically, studies have found that attackers usually plan for anywhere between days and months before committing a crime. Further, while perpetrators do not often threaten their targets directly, other people usually know enough to be concerned before a plan is carried out; for example, in 80 percent of school shooting cases, other students and teachers knew trouble may be imminent (Miller, 2014). Further, in a study of more than 3,750 high school students, University of Virginia researchers discovered that even when students were personally threatened, they tended to keep quiet. Among the 12 percent of students who reported being threatened at school, only 26 percent told a teacher or administrator

(Virginia Journal of School Violence, 2012). The problem is clear: threat assessment only works if someone not only suspects a possible problem but follows through to tell someone. It seems plausible that this likelihood increases the more one is socially bonded to a school and its staff.

Therefore, implementation of a threat assessment approach requires educating the school community about the importance of a positive school climate, one that focuses on providing help for students before problems escalate into violence (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). School staff members are encouraged to adopt a flexible, problem-solving approach, as distinguished from a more punitive, zero tolerance approach to student misbehavior. If this training is intended to generate broader changes in the nature of staff-student interactions around disciplinary matters. Crucially, it also encourages a more positive school climate in which students feel treated with fairness and respect, thereby establishing students' trust in adults and willingness to seek help for problems and concerns (Cornell & Sheras, 2006).

Fein and colleagues (2004) have an "action plan" that outlines the major components and tasks for creating a safe school climate. It includes assessment of the school's emotional climate; emphasis on the importance of listening in schools; adoption of a strong, but caring stance against the code of silence (meaning student unwillingness to talk to teachers for being seen as a "snitch"); prevention of, and intervention in, bullying; involvement of all members of the school community in building a school culture of safety and respect; development of trusting relationships or bonds between each student and at least one adult at school; and the creation of mechanisms for developing and sustaining safe school climates.

Trusting relationships between adults and students are the products of quality connection, interaction, and communications (Fein et al, 2004). These relationships evolve and do not come about simply because a teacher and a student have been assigned to interact with one another. Schools with cultures and climates of safety monitor students on a regular basis, and school administrators should take steps to ensure that at least one adult at school knows what is happening with each student (Fein et al, 2004). By working to create that connection, threat assessment establishes the needed bond between a student and the school. The student overcomes the fear of opening up and has a meaningful attachment to his school through an adult on site.

Policy Recommendation

If, as is widely suggested (Tait, 2006), there requires more research to fully understand how to address violence in schools from a policy perspective, a logical suggestion is to prepare those embarking upon a career in the classroom to identify, assess, and respond to potential threats from students.

Aspiring teachers are required to take many compulsory courses regarding the profession in pursuit of their careers. The policy proposal here is two-fold: First, it would see a course teaching those in B.Ed programs and teachers colleges on violence in their schools, specifically covering the definitions of school violence, the common causes of violence, signs of potential imminent violence, how to go about a threat assessment protocol, and a possible range of intervention/case management solutions. Second, it would require that threat assessment training become mandatory for school districts across the country.

There is considerable precedence for this training for teachers already in the profession. For example, the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response (CCTATR) offers several courses on assessing risk in classrooms and the theory behind school violence (CCTATR, 2017). Further, school violence is a topic covered in various professional development workshops and seminars that teachers are required to attend, such as through Safeteen (<http://www.safeteen.ca/>), based in Vancouver, British Columbia; again, however, these workshops and seminars are not mandatory for educators to take.

However, there is a clear lack of such opportunities offered by faculties of education in Canada. At Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN), for example, the course “School Violence: Leadership and Policy Implications” is offered, but only at the graduate level—and it is not compulsory (MUN, 2016). The University of Winnipeg, offers “Youth and Violence in Schools” as part of its post-graduate Post-Baccalaureate Diploma In Education (PBDE), but again, this course is not compulsory. The University of Western Ontario (UWO) offers a module on violence as part of its larger graduate course on students’ mental health (UWO, 2016).

Currently there is a unique opportunity to identify and curb violence in schools by learning from the mistakes and myths of past policy initiatives and seeking to educate teachers *before* they enter the classroom. Richard Jaffe at the University of Western Ontario, has developed a course on Safe Schools: Emerging Research, Policy and Practice for School Systems, which is specifically designed to help aspiring teachers understand the challenges of identifying and addressing violence amongst students (Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario, 2013). It is also a graduate level course, but its material and

goals are extremely relevant to anyone considering working in a school with young people. Jaffe's course themes include (but are not limited to): helping new teachers identify key issues in assessing and maintaining a safe school environment; identifying sustainable strategies for violence prevention; providing evidence to support the need for prevention, identification, and treatment of school violence; and developing in-depth knowledge of safe school issues to present to educators, parents and community groups.

Jaffe's course covers many specific and practical topics for educators, including a background in safe school history; bullying; how violence at home impacts families and students; social media and students; and homophobia. An adapted, mandatory version of it for undergraduate students would be an outstanding addition to education faculties' curriculum.

A course such as this for undergraduates also offers a chance to explore alternative strategies in addressing school violence, particularly as regards trauma informed classroom management. According to Van der Kolk, (2003), exposure to trauma can negatively affect children's relationships with peers and teachers. Children who have experienced trauma may be distrustful or suspicious of others, leading them to question the reliability and predictability of their relationships with classmates and teachers. Crucially, Streeck-Fischer and van der Kolk (2000) argued that that children who have been exposed to violence often have difficulty responding to social cues and may withdraw from social situations or bully others—in other words, on the path to becoming violent themselves.

Further, Margolin and Gordis (2000) contend that students who have experienced trauma may feel that authority figures have failed to provide safety for them in the past and

may therefore be distrustful of teachers or SROs. Rules and behavioural consequences may actually increase the potential for re-traumatization, while at the same time increase the chances these children will be subject to school discipline and exclusionary practices on a repeated basis.

Conclusion

Recognizing the impact that trauma (and in many cases, violent trauma) has on a student's behaviour in school—particularly as regards their propensity for violence themselves—allows teachers to move away from the one-size-fits all approach mandated by zero tolerance policies and stop the erosion of trust between pupils and school administrators. It is that trust that is necessary for the proper attachment between student and school, and that attachment hinges on the teachers. A Jaffe-inspired course could position teachers as partners with students in their educational pursuits. They would be given the background to understand and identify the problems young people face and how to recognize issues related to school violence. In effect, it may be time to consider moving away from expansive school-wide policies to combat the issue of violence in schools, and turn to training (and trusting) the professionals who work with the students every day: their teachers.

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