

North American culture is becoming increasingly violent and uncontrollable. With schools representing a pooling of the community, standards of behavior within the community and those learned at home are being brought to school. Acts of violence disrupt the normal functioning of a school, and the fear of violence prevents both students and teachers from concentrating on meaningful learning and teaching. The American education system needs to realize that there is a problem with violence and start implementing programs that will help prevent further violent acts within the system. Many scholars have reflected on things that might trigger violence, who should be held responsible, and ways to prevent violence in schools.

The future of America will be partially determined by the students of today's schools. The affects of violence on society in the future depend upon the action society takes today towards ridding the schools of violence. Communities, local and federal governments, as well as teachers and parents need to join forces in the fight against school violence. The ideal climate for learning cannot be established by a single leader within a school. Community-wide care and dedication are required to make a difference in the safety of America's schools and to prevent future problems with violence in society.

A school's environment not only affects learning capabilities; it also affects how students conform to society. The social environment of a school can influence how students behave more powerfully than the home or community. The fear of physical harm is often debilitating to students, restraining their ability to learn. Fear also creates other problems within the school, such as truancy and dropout rates. According to the National Education Association, 160,000 children skip school each day because of intimidation by their peers (Jerome, 2001, p. 56).

SueEllen and Paula Fried state that, "bullies seem to share the same traits, like many bullies have

been abused at home. So when a child (bully) sees someone at school who is vulnerable looking they feel threatened because it reminds them of the shame and humiliation of their own victimization” (1996, p. 87). The U.S. Secret Service conducted a study last fall that found of the 37 school shootings since 1974, that two-thirds of the attackers felt “persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured”(Jerome, 2001, p.57).

In U.S. culture, media plays a huge part of everyday life. Violence is portrayed in cartoons, movies, soap operas, and especially in the news. As a child watches Saturday morning cartoons, he or she is supplied with 26.4 incidents of violence per hour (Hill & Hill, 1994, p. 7). It has been estimated that by the time a child is twelve years old, he or she will have been exposed to 18,000 television murders (Sadovnik, Cookson, & Semel, 2001, p.131). The message that materialism, easy sex, drug use, and violence is glamorous saturates children’s senses during the years when value structures are being formed (Hill et al, 1994, p. 7). Attaining the material goods that the media portrays as “cool” is a source of high status for adolescents. Members of lower socioeconomic classes become stressed due to the lack of means to acquire such goods, therefore resulting to the “take what I want” mentality. Media translates being “bad” as being tough and smart consequently distorting the idea to adolescents who often look to the media for guidance.

The media also misguides adolescents with inquiring minds about the use of alcohol. Before a child is eighteen, he or she will have seen over 100,000 beer commercials (Hill et al, 1994, p. 7). Drinking is portrayed as glamorous and fun often leaving the consequences and responsibilities of drinking out. Students have been sneaking alcohol into school functions for

years. Movies and television shows have constantly used the typical instance of a student pouring alcohol into the punch at a school dance. The arousal and cognitive effects of alcohol include, but are not limited to, the loss of inhibitions, inability to judge the degree of situations, and intensification of emotions (Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998, p. 75). Irresponsible use of drugs and alcohol can lead to senseless acts of violence. It is the parent's responsibility to supervise what their children watch on television. New cable and television systems are making it even easier for parents to block programs and channels that are inappropriate for their children. Children annually experience 100,000 hours of unsupervised television that contains five to eight violent acts per hour and there are at least two million school-aged children with no adult supervision after school (Duhon-Sells, 1995, p. 9). The overexposure of media violence to students plays a role in school violence. Basically kids are copycats. When a young boy sees the Power Rangers kicking and fighting to get rid of the bad guys, he will imitate their behavior. The evidence for this is a personal experience of one of the group members. However, the role of the media and the bully are only two factors that can trigger violence.

The origin of school violence is often not found in the child's experience at school, but in the child's home life. Children from single-parent homes are twice as likely to drop out of school and more likely to be late, in trouble, and truant while enrolled in school (Hill et al, 1994, p. 3). Teen pregnancy, homelessness, and chemically dependent parents are also contributors. In one reported incident, "just before lunch an angry kindergartner hit his teacher with a chair, when we arrived at his home to talk with his mother, she opened the door naked and stoned," stated Hill and Hill (1994, p.2).

While most of the arguments and research agree on the various types of school violence that cause problems and the areas from which they originate, there is opposition about whom should take responsibility. Many say it is the parent's responsibility to teach their children the difference between right and wrong and what is socially acceptable behavior. Others state that the teachers and administrators of the school system should take their responsibility in the punishment of disorderly and violent behavior among students.

In order to solve the problem of school violence it is necessary to admit that there is a problem. Identifying an actual or possible problem says that the foresight, knowledge, and planning skills are a part of the school board's agenda (Landen, 1994, p. 78). Metal detectors, drug sniffing dogs, security personnel, and restrictive rules are not solutions they are only techniques for handling violence on an incident basis. These measures will help regain control, but will not disintegrate the problem. The development of an overall plan for school discipline and safety is the responsibility of the policy makers (Landen, 1994, p. 79). Educational policy makers can take such measures as updating policies so that they are appropriate for current and anticipated situations, give clear guidance to administration for providing a disciplined and secure learning environments, as well as getting advice from legal counsel concerning the schools and the board's liabilities (Landen, 1994, p.79). Extracurricular activities such as academic and athletics are excellent ways of enhancing student camaraderie and sportsmanship. In 1999, Georgia Governor Roy Barnes signed an anti-bullying law that allows schools to expel any student that is disciplined three times for picking on others. In Washington State, Governor Gary Locke is pressing for anti-bullying training in schools. These two policies should be the stepping stones to future national education policies dealing with school violence (Jerome, 2001, p.55).

Teachers and administrators also can help improve the learning environment of schools. By helping students build self-esteem, teachers are gaining the trust and respect of their students while helping the students gain respect for themselves. Teachers can provide support and suggest counseling to students with problems while also helping students with conflict resolution and peer mediation (Day, 1996, p.84). Cooperative learning, in which the teacher provides instruction to the larger group, then students split into smaller groups of mixed skill levels to help each other master material, has shown positive effects on academic achievement (Hawkins, Farrington, & Catalano, 1994, p.200). Working in groups builds relationships that might otherwise turn into violence. Counseling and fostering teamwork seem most effective as evidenced by success in a program in Dekalb County, Georgia. The program offers conflict resolution courses and team oriented outdoor activities that demand cooperation among the students (Jerome, 2001, p.60). In order for the school's administrators to be effective there are certain responsibilities they must maintain. Principals can be effective leaders for their schools community by most importantly, being highly visible to the student body (Hill et al, 1994, p.28). It is the principal's responsibility to keep in touch with formal and informal student leaders to get their outlook on events and occurrences within the student community. Making themselves readily available to teachers, parents and students helps principals maintain a positive school environment. When the students, parents and staff feel a sense of ownership and community in the school, they are less likely to work against one another (Kadel & Follman, 1994, p.32). Schools and communities must be obligated to one another as well as to the cause. Parents must

reinforce lessons being taught in the schools. The school system must be dedicated to the parent's concerns for their children's safety. Schools can get the community involved through requiring community service projects from their students. In Atlanta, Georgia, graduation requirements for students include 75 hours of service to the community (Kadel et al, 1994, p.48). This type of requirement helps prevent violent behavior by forcing interaction among students of different backgrounds by encouraging the students to be caring towards others. Schools can also use the media to promote action in the community. The attention school crime and violence receives can be used to pressure local policy makers and officials to focus their efforts on where the problem is. Parents in the community can take action by leading support groups. Jenny Weiland, a mother of a school shooting victim, helped start Mothers Against Violence In America (MAVIA) in 1994, and in 1998, she became the first director of Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) (Jerome, 2001, p.58).

The research we found said little about the procedure schools went through after an act of violence had occurred. Grievance procedures were scarce among the information we covered. From personal experiences we commonly agree that the schools should make it a point to implement counseling for procedures for students when violence is a problem in the school. The counseling should not be a single session in which the counselor stands in front of the class and asks if everyone is okay. Rather, it should include an on going inquiry into how the students handle day to day violence among themselves, as well as inquiries about how teachers and faculty are handling the violence occurring among students. When classmates and or faculty are lost due to a violent act within the school there must be a system to help everyone deal with the loss.

For American schools to become safe and secure for teaching and learning experiences there must be an equal involvement and dedication to solving the problem of school violence from the president to the parent. The responsibility lies in the hands of the parents, policy makers and everyone in between to make the American Education System as safe for students and faculty as possible.

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