Wilding and School Violence: Past and Present Trends

Kenneth Pearson, Sociology
Michael Ball, Ph. D.
Department of Sociology

Abstract

Over the past years American schools have been subject to the most violent acts committed by children in American history. The type of violence and harassment seen at schools has become progressively worse. In this research paper, a theory called “wilding” is tested to see if it can help explain why American schools have become increasingly violent. Interviews with three school district superintendents were conducted to see if local schools of Northwest Wisconsin and Northeastern Minnesota have become more violent over the years, and what procedures and policies were implemented to curb the violence and harassment.

Introduction

1940 proved a volatile period for school violence with running in the halls, tardiness, spitballs, and chewing gun topping the list. Today’s children muse at these trifles, as they fear rape, murder, drugs, and assault with a deadly weapon daily (Goodfight, 2004). The Columbine school shooting apexes a decade of schoolyard massacres. During the violent decade, media and political attention concerning school violence caused a nationwide epidemic. This paper will explore why students have become more violent over the past few years, and how “wilding” helps explain the students’ violent outbursts.

For better understanding of this paper some definitions need to be addressed. The first term is school violence. School violence will host many meanings; among them are bullying, fighting, verbal harassing, and taunting that have traditionally occurred in schools. School violence will also mean the use of and bringing of weapons to school for the intention of actions harming a fellow student. Another term needing definition is wilding. Charles Derber best explains wilding as a “vast spectrum of self-centered and self-aggrandizing behavior that harms others” (Derber, 2002: 8). Most often times the aggressor or offender feels no remorse and enjoys the damage inflicted (Derber, 2002). A wilding epidemic (such as the school shootings) tears a society at the seams and threatens to unravel it altogether, providing a strong reflection of the eroding moral order (Derber, 2002).
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Anomie represents “a tendency for social norms to lose their regulatory force…They become progressively more intense at lower levels of the social-class...[as] obstacles to use [as] the legitimate means for success are greater in the lower classes” (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001: 11). This theory of anomie is similar to Merton’s concept of anomie as a socioeconomic indicator through which only the lower economic classes of society can be affected. Messner and Rosenfeld also view anomie as does Emile Durkheim, claiming it is the “suicide of a society” (2001: 10) which could be spread evenly across all the social classes. Anomie describes the breakdown of societal norms and values in order to achieve a certain goal. As more social-strains and obstacles are placed in the way of success, the more one is vulnerable to striving for his or her goal by illegitimate means. Since anomie’s result is the American Dream, anyone can fall victim to its clutches.

The American Dream exists in our cultural ethos as a social capitalistic construction. It drives individuals to become the most successful or to own the most material possessions (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001). Whatever the thrust, the American Dream is a very important topic when speaking about wilding. Success assumes different definitions in the minds of many people. However, in the American Dream, success is incomplete because it will never become totally obtainable. We will fall as victim in pursuit. Some will try to gain their American Dream any way possible by going outside traditional social norms. We find anomie in this type of person. As anomie infects other people, societal norms will break down and society will then face a wilding epidemic. Wilding, anomie, and the American Dream are interrelated and help explain the school violence epidemic that has threatened the safety of our country’s students.

The time frame of this paper encompasses schools’ policies and violent behavior patterns before and after April 20, 1999, the day the Columbine school shooting occurred. The National Center for Educational Statistics 1999 report signifies the importance of Columbine with regard to school safety. The NCES report that students at Columbine High School after the April 20, 1999, shootings felt more fear of being harmed or attacked arriving at or leaving school than previously. In addition, students were more likely to notify school faculty if one of their peers brought a gun to school (NCES, 2002).

**Literature Review**

Has school violence actually been on the rise? Have only certain types of violence become more popular while others have leveled off or declined over the years? The most deadly school attack happened in Bath,
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Michigan, on May 18, 1927, when a school board member bombed the Bath Consolidated School. A school tax increase and an impending foreclosure of his farm enraged the school board member. For revenge, the school board member planted dynamite and wires all around the school, something that took months of preparation. The dynamite blast killed 37 students and two teachers (Ellsworth, 1927). Yet unlike other attacks today, this was an adult attacking students, not students killing each other. Derber (2002) expresses concern that school violence is now widely accepted as a national crisis. In contrast, DeVoe, et al. (2003) found school violence has leveled off in recent years, this after a steady decline over the past decade. They claim that violent crime is defined as rape, theft, sexual assault, robbery, and physical assault. The rate of this violent crime dropped from 48 incidents per 1,000 students in 1992 to 28 incidents per 1,000 students in 2001. Serious violent crime, such as rape, sexual assault, and aggravated assault, rose 25% from 2000 to 2001, and homicides rose slightly from 10 to 14 after 2000 (DeVoe, et al., 2003).

Reza, et al. (2003) report one-third of the 128 firearms used by 123 students in school-related suicides and/or homicides came from the students’ own home. Twenty-three percent of the guns used came from the offender’s friend or relative, 23% came from unknown sources, and 16% of the guns used came from other sources. If a firearm from the offender’s home was used in a homicide at a school, 67% of the time there were multiple victims, with female victims taking 75% of the total casualty toll. The perpetrators were usually white males rather than female or any other ethnic or racial group (Reza, et al., 2003). Derber (2002) adds that the U.S. Center for Disease Control have found 10 percent of students have brought a weapon to school.

The National Center for Educational Statistics reports in their 1999 School Crime Supplement that school violence has been an issue studied since the 1970’s when the Safe Schools Study was implemented by the National Institute of Education. An additional comment made by the NCES (2002) states that our schools are relatively safe. To summarize: school violence itself is not on the rise, but the type of violent school crime has changed.

Who is most at risk of creating a potential threat of violence in our schools? Brokenbrough, et al. (2002) studied the most common at risk candidates for school violence. Their study confirms that aggressive children who have high victimization experiences are most at risk to promote violent behavior (Brockenbrough, et al., 2002). Malecki and Demaray (2003) found that a child who has been the victim of aggressive behavior will be at higher risk for becoming an offender of more severe and violent crimes. They also found that students who carried weapons to
school reported less overall or less total perceived social support than those who did not carry weapons (Malecki and Demaray, 2003).

Charles Derber discusses the ways in which revenge and violence are triggered by the American Dream. Derber defines “wilding” and explains two different forms of wilding: expressive and instrumental wilding. Wilding in general, according to Derber’s definition, “includes a vast spectrum of self-centered and self-aggrandizing behavior that harms others” (Derber, 2002: 08). Expressive wilding, as Derber writes, is “wilding for the sheer satisfaction of indulging one’s own destructive impulses…” (2002: 08); whereas, instrumental wilding is “wilding for money, career advancement, or other calculable personal gain” (2002: 08).

In school violence both strains are found as they both relate to antisocial self-centeredness made possible by a lack of empathy and a collapse of moral restraint. The extreme school violence witnessed in our recent past is summed up best by what wilding does to society. Indeed, “a wilding epidemic tears the social fabric and threatens to unravel society itself, ultimately reflecting the erosion of the moral order and the withdrawal of feelings and commitments from others to oneself, to ‘number one’” (Derber, 2002: 08).

Derber (2002) also focuses on Durkheim’s theories of anomie. Durkheim believed individualism was acceptable, but feared it could make social bonding impossible. Durkheim deduced this when he started to see the breakdown of traditional social solidarity. Encompassed by a rise of individuals who were less involved with their communities, the societal breakdown gave way to anomie as individuals started to grow farther and farther from their social communities. Their consciousness of society’s norms and morals followed suite. As a result, a society developed that lacks a common moral compass. This societal normlessness will begin to breed crime and violence in a community. We find instrumental and expressive wilding more common in our individualistic societies (Derber, 2002). Instrumental wilding develops as anomie fuels individuals to become more vulnerable to the American Dream of limitless money and power. Expressive wilding, found in individualistic societies, weakens personal and community controls that sustain the norms to civilized values (Derber, 2002).

Messner and Rosenfeld look into institutional wilding in more detail by focusing on how the school itself, a victim of instrumental wilding, fails in trying to develop institutional control over its students. This ultimately leads to unsafe schools and a breeding ground for violent behavior. Messner and Rosenfeld discuss how the outbreak of school shootings in the late 1990s help to reinforce the United States’ violent

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1 Such as school violence

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reputation. They remind us that “there are no safe havens from a rapacious violence” (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001: 32).

Revenge appears to be the main cause for school violence. As reported earlier by Brockenbrough, et al. (2002) and Malecki and Demaray (2003), aggressive students who are victimized will have a higher chance of retaliating with more violence. In the nine school shooting cases in which revenge was most apparent, the students were all rejected by their peers as social outcasts. The bloodiest and most publicized event of recent school violence, the Littleton, Colorado, Columbine High School shooting, was based upon revenge. Leary, et al. (2003) report evidence found after the incident suggests it was retribution for the treatment against the students who teased and rejected Harris and Klebold. Leary, et al. (2003: 207) continue with a statement Dylan Klebold made prior to the shootings, “I’m going to kill you all…You’ve been giving us shit for years.” The “shit” Klebold made reference to were the years of ostracism, taunting, and bullying by Eric Harris’s and Kelbold’s constituents (Leary, et al., 2003: 207). After 15 minutes of horror, 12 students died, 24 were wounded, and the 2 gunmen were dead from self-inflicted gunshot wounds (Beresförd, 2003).

The Mount Morris Township, Michigan, shooting by a six-year-old boy in February of 2000, was also motivated by revenge. The boy retaliated on a fellow first-grader by scaring her with a loaded gun. He told the girl that he did not like her and ended up killing her (Leary, et al., 2003). The March 24, 1998 school shooting at Jonesboro, Arkansas, committed by Andrew Golden and Mitchell Johnson, was also revenge based. Johnson, the leader, stated prior to the massacre that he “had a lot of killing to do” (Leary, et al., 2003, 206) after he was rejected by a girl and was tired of being picked on. Golden, who had had a steady upbringing, was also upset about being rejected by his girlfriend. Together, armed with handguns and rifles, the 13 and 11 year old opened fire on their middle school killing 5 and injuring 11 (Leary, et al., 2003).

Some shootings can be interpreted as attempts to fulfill the American Dream. The belief behind this “success” is that everyone will be treated equally with no fear of rejection or ostracism. The students who committed these shootings wanted people to respect them and felt they were standing up for others like them. One shooting that idealizes the focus of the American Dream was the West Paducah, Kentucky incident. Michael Carneal armed himself with a semiautomatic pistol and killed three of his classmates. His reasons for the killing were simple: he grew tired of being teased (his classmates repeatedly called him dweeb or faggot, and called him gay in the school paper) and was quoted saying as “People respect me” after the shooting (Leary, et al., 2003: 206). His American
Dream was respect from his classmates, something he longed for and that they continued to deny him.

Kelly (2003) correlates wilding and the American Dream by comparing the response of parents in the 2003 Glenbrook North High School hazing incident that occurred in an affluent Chicago suburb. The event was supposed to be an annual powder puff football game, but instead turned into a violent and sadistic hazing, in which senior girls doused their junior classmates in urine, feces, paint, fish guts, and trash, while the juniors were wrapped in pig intestines. The senior girls also punched and slapped the junior girls. The event was videotaped. Even more shocking than this event alone were the parents’ reactions to the principal’s punishment of a four-day suspension to the 28 girls and 10 boys who were involved in the hazing. When parents found out about the suspensions, three of them sued the school to rescind the suspensions on claims of irreparable damage caused by the suspensions. One complaint included the issue of a female student who would miss the prom because of the suspension (Kelly, 2003).

Kelly (2003) believes protecting children from the consequences is as old as parenthood. Many parents, while agreeing that wrong choices should have consequences, back down from imposing consequences due to the potential blemish on the child’s school record or the chance that their child will not get into an elite college. Kelly states when raising the “trophy kid,” the focus leans towards good grades and perfect SAT scores rather than on moral development. From this a child develops no conscience or no sense of remorse or accountability, and certainly no empathy for others. The hazing at Glenbrook opened a larger Pandora’s Box on how we view the American Dream today. It demonstrates wilding at its greatest, because the children’s parents wanted their children to figuratively get away with murder, with no consequences or remorse for what they did. Misdemeanor assault was later charged (Kelly, 2003). The parents’ lack of moral consequence rested on the fear of rejection from an Ivy League school and/or a chance to go to the prom. In the end, the parents’ own dream for their children set them deeper into anomie against society’s norms and expectations.

A theory that ties the American Dream and revenge together is Goffman’s theory of social capital. Social capital relates to losing or gaining face in social situations (Goffman, 1967). The perceptions of “face” are especially important during the teenage years when social perceptions mean everything. The best example of gaining and losing face is in the social situation of a bully and his victim. The bully is expected to maintain his face by picking on other children. A present day bully does not typify the traditional stereotype. Rather present day bully is a popular person who needs to keep his face by taking others’. When the bully
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succeeds in taking face, he not only gains one level in social capital, but his victim loses one level; resulting in a gap of two social capital levels between them. As the taunting and ostracism continue, the victim/bully gap will continue to grow. Eventually, as a way of revenge or achieving the American Dream of a higher social capital, the victim will snap by striking back at the bully to deface him and gain some face back. In a mild case this could come through a small fight or a dissembling from the victim to the bully. In extreme cases, we end up with Columbine.

Even after these violent examples, there is the belief that school violence has not been increasing or becoming worse in the past years. The increase in violence is blamed on stronger media attention to the problems that address our schools every day. When major school shootings are added, the media can manipulate what seems like a major societal wilding epidemic out of events that have been ongoing for years. This holds especially true when middle class suburbia is hit by traditional inner city, urban violence. Michael Welch, ET al. (2002) have brought the term “wilding” and “moral panic” to light. These authors believe the media, rather than informing the public in an enlightened understanding of societal problems such as youth violence, actually play society’s fears to manipulate hostility towards an easily identifiable group of people to blame (Welch, et al., 2002). The media conveys breaking stories to the public in forms of expressions or catch phrases. They believe the term wilding was able to capture the public’s fear and fancy about runaway crime and super-predators. The media relied heavily on this word and replaced more traditional legal terms with this new inflammatory language. Wilding indeed was a term created to impact society and culture by being another synonym for youth violence (Welch et al, 2002). As “wilding indeed appears to represent a form of lawlessness,” it subconsciously is a hard word to overlook because of the wild essence that can be interpreted by reading it (Welch et al, 2002: 9).

Glassner (1999) believes the media infuses our culture with a sense of fear. Journalists and politicians portray the string of schoolyard shootings in the late 90’s as conceptualizing small town children to become maniacal and to perpetuate school violence (Glassner, 1999). Victor Kappeler, et al. (2000) also touch on the Columbine tragedy. After the tragedy in Littleton, Colorado, journalists proceeded to report on every instance dealing with a student who would bring a knife or gun to school, or report every bomb threat made to a school. This barrage of media coverage forced American society to believe that schools were no longer safe. No matter how immature it may be to call in a bomb threat, it is and always will be a reckless ruse to cancel an exam (Kappeler et al., 2000).

As we can see, there is concern about school violence and a growing tendency of children to behave in more violent ways than in years
past. However, when both sides of the issue are raised, there may not be such a strong concern about children killing their classmates. This research looks at the policies of Northland schools in place before and after Columbine, and will determine how these school districts reacted to the perceived threats of school violence.

**Methodology**

For this research, a 12 question self-created interview was given. The questions were asked of three school district superintendents. In the process, one district’s director of operation personnel was interviewed as a substitute for the superintendent. For the purpose of the paper and the anonymity of the school districts and those persons interviewed, all persons interviewed are labeled as superintendent, then a number follows (e.g. Superintendent #1). The survey included questions about district ethnic demographics, discipline statistics, educational barriers, tolerance, weapon, and violence policies pre and post Columbine, checklists or profiling of troubled students, and security measures before and after Columbine2.

The aim of the research was to see if schools, through both the policies in place and newly created, were actually becoming more violent. Room was available for the superintendents to express their thoughts and concerns about the policies. This information will be used to determine whether or not schools have actually become more violent or if the policies have only made it seem that way.

The three school districts involved were in partially urban areas, whose population ranged from 2,000 to 10,000 students. The economic disparities of the school districts ranged from students who lived in poverty, based on the median annual household income of $18,000 for four people (Boushey, et al., 2001), to students who came from multimillionaire families. Caucasian students comprised the majority of the three school districts, with Native Americans comprising the second largest ethnic group, then African-American and finally Asian-American students. The superintendents interviewed were all Caucasian males. Each school district’s ethnic demographics are in close correlation to the local district’s population.

The interview questions were approved under an institutional review board, and placed under the University of Wisconsin-Superior Protocol #110. The IRB approval was required to maintain assurance that all procedures and questions were handled properly and ethically and that anonymity would be maintained throughout the process.

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2 The actual survey is included in Appendix A
Findings

Discipline and Educational Barriers

Discipline problems in all three districts seemed to be similar to those in districts of comparable size. One superintendent noted that females are practicing more violence now than in the past 20 years. Another commented that his district is expelling students in 2004 that would not have been 25 years ago due to more strict policies. They all agreed that smaller class size and few educational barriers lead to low discipline problems. However, due to tight economic times, money seemed to be the largest educational barrier.

Checklists and Profiling Pre and Post Columbine

Before Columbine, it appears the districts looked for the obvious outward aggressiveness to determine their problem students. Special needs children were watched closely because they were the ones with the most behavioral and anti-social problems. Though there were special education programs at the districts, inner-turmoil was not considered as high a threat. Superintendent #2 summed up the events of Columbine and the lackadaisical efforts made by the school districts to prevent it by stating, “Columbine shocked us all by the degree of violence” (Personal Communication, May 2004).

Since Columbine, the superintendents want faculty and staff more cognizant of certain words and actions. Verbalization is taken more seriously. If the verbalization or aggression is frequent, all three districts will work hard to prevent violence, even if it means the student will be suspended or expelled. However, all the superintendents deny the use of profiling or checklists.

Violence Prevention Programs Pre and Post Columbine

The districts have always had both counselors to deal with anti-social behaviors and curricula teaching students how to get along with each other. The Minnesota legislature in the late 1980s and early 1990s introduced policies that focused attention on harassment, bullying, intimidation, and aggression. After April 20, 1999, districts amended their policies to become more proactive than reactive. One superintendent found punitive measures did not work and introduced mediation and restoration.

Survey results are included as verbatim in Appendix B
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All the districts added counselors specialized in dealing with anti-social behaviors. The districts are also geared toward finding the problems behind troubled students, rather than the punishment alone. Age-appropriate programs focusing on tolerance have also been introduced.

**Tolerance Policies and Punishment Pre and Post Columbine**

The three districts’ tolerance policies before Columbine were directed toward harassment and anti-bullying. Punitive measures were the most common way to deal with noncompliance with policies. Today there is an even bigger focus on bullying and harassment. However, the superintendents believe all students are guaranteed a right to free education, so none completely sell out to zero-tolerance policies. Instead, the superintendents seek a more case-by-case, common sense approach to punishments, including mediation. They really try to empower the students to help get behind the problem.

**Weapon Policies Pre and Post Columbine**

Weapons were not allowed on school grounds even before Columbine. Most districts would not take action against students if the weapon were in compliance with the law and there was no intent to injure or kill. Weapons in compliance with the law included unloaded guns in cases locked in a car or pocketknives. Now the definition of a weapon has changed dramatically. Even a facsimile of a weapon, such as a laser pointer, could be grounds for expulsion. However, most situations are dealt with by a sensible approach, but actions will be taken to resolve the situation.

**Security Policies Pre and Post Columbine**

Security was never a major issue before Columbine. It consisted of asking visitors to register in an office, locking doors to prevent truancy or vandalism from rival football teams, or hiring police officers at larger dances or football games. Even though the three districts do not resemble any of the metal-detected, police dog, lockdown schools of large cities, security procedures have reached extremes when compared with those of pre-Columbine days. All the districts practice different intruder lockdown levels and codes. These include clearing hallways and locking doors. The number and locations of doors allowed open are now regulated, and supervisors are positioned at the entrances to receive guests. If guests do not comply, they could be arrested for trespassing.
Discussion

The general consensus among the superintendents is that schools are fairly safe and the students are not as violent as the policies make them appear. Through legislature and district violence task forces, steps have been taken to create safer schools for everyone; however, the student’s actual behavior has not changed dramatically. Superintendent #2 states

With the policies significantly different now, we have to enforce it. However, we take a more common sense approach. For example, we won’t expel a student for an entire year for an inadvertent act with no malicious attempt to injure or kill. If districts are complacent about student’s complaints and if they don’t take action, they could be sued (Personal communication, May 2004).

A common sense, case by case approach appears to be a major movement for all the local schools.

These findings are consistent with those of Austin (2003). Austin believes zero tolerance policies are actually excessive and unwarranted. He states that the proliferation of school attacks in the media is an inaccurate representation, and school boards and legislatures have gone too far with reactive policy making. Austin believes misrepresentation leads to a program of zero-tolerance-wholesale-adoption by school districts. He also questions the efficacy of the created policies in helping to reduce the number of violent acts (Austin, 2003). When the superintendents were questioned about zero-tolerance policies in their schools, the following responses were given. Superintendent #1 suggested if a pupil still wanted to shoot someone they will, regardless of the policies or security measures. Superintendent #3 continued

We claim to be “zero”-tolerant, but it never stops the incident from happening. Each incident of violence and weapons will have consequences. For some schools (not many) zero-tolerance meant once you violated you could not come anymore. But few schools have a zero-tolerance policy that means you’re out. Young people are guaranteed the right to fair education (Personal communication, May 2004).
In comment to the stricter policies created, Superintendent #1 also added,

We have a paradox of stricter policies versus common sense and mediation. School districts are moving back to common sense views with the feelings of overreaction. Kids still do some “aggressive” behavior before and after Columbine. Kids are still kids. Even an “A” student could get in trouble for horseplay and give a bump to another student (Personal communication, May 2004).

Superintendent #2 also felt the policy recommendations went too far. He reported that in a handbook he received from the Safe Schools Initiative, it stated where to plant and where not to plant shrubbery, something not thought about ten years ago. Superintendent #3 spoke about the fine line between schools becoming inclusive and exclusive with security policies. He confirmed that fact that the district has increased security and stations supervisors in main entrances to receive guests. While doing this, the district’s goal is to welcome parents. In reality, he pointed out, they don’t know all the parents, so they try to be open and welcoming while maintaining secure measures. In relation, Kennedy wrote that a school could be a scary place for strangers or even students with increased measures such as limited public use, following crisis plans such as lockdowns (one area district has as many as three different lockdowns and color codes for each level), lighting, resource officers (all districts have police liaison and special violence/harassment counselors), access control or identification cards, and cameras. With all these measures in place, alienation could replace the educational experience and the school environment itself then would mimic a prison rather than a place of education (2004).

Yet, stronger policies have not proven to be completely negative for the area districts. As stated before, all three area districts studied have special counselors to deal specifically with violence and harassment cases. An article written by Osterman asserts that districts should follow her guidelines in order to return to a more civil society. They include making harassment and abuse in classrooms unacceptable, promoting an environment of tolerance and acceptance, reaching out to the students who seem different from the norm, and providing a safe place for students to get to know each other better (2003). Our area districts have indeed set guidelines like Osterman’s. Superintendent #1 sees a greater awareness of certain words and actions from students who are isolated or anti social. In fact, his district’s philosophy’s mirror Osterman’s guidelines. Superintendent #1 notices:
Teachers are more cognizant for a movement to make better relationships between all students and staff. Verbalization is also looked at more seriously now, and it creates a greater intensity and draws more attention. With this there is a big focus on bullying and harassment. We see more intervention to investigate complaints on verbalizations (calling someone gay) and is not accepted anymore. We are working on bringing more understanding on tolerance by helping empower students more in decision-making processes to help give more control over their lives. We look at individual cause and effects to create a picture to help environment of school district and students involved (Personal communication, May 2004).

To augment this philosophy, Superintendent #2 noted that threats are taken more seriously. If the aggression is frequent or severe they will take steps to expel students. Superintendent #3 concurred that his district is more sensitive to comments to friends and peers that reflect deep unhappiness or desire to extract revenge such as, “I’m getting picked on, and I’m going to stop it.” After a child is spotted with a concern, such as an academic fall off, extreme increase in absenteeism, or avoidance behavior, the student is then referred to an assessment. His district has also implemented programs directed towards age-specific and age-appropriate areas such as suggested by Osterman (2003).

Students have changed taking school violence to an extreme by bringing weapons to school, getting into more violent fights over less significant confrontations than in the past, and getting revenge on classmates by committing a school wide firearm assault. This type of behavior can be attributed to “wilding” in which students, motivated by revenge and the American Dream take action against classmates by any means necessary (Derber, 2002). In addition, the implementation of and practices of more strict policies and nationwide school crackdowns may seem to portray that wilding is indeed occurring in every school across the nation. However, Derber reminds us that policies have ways of becoming self-defeating if they stand alone (2002). A “zero-tolerance” policy, if it stands alone, has a great chance of imploding on itself, especially if common sense and programs supporting it are not applied. In order to return to a complete civil society, the districts would have to create programs that work with the new policies to bring awareness about the dangerous and violent behaviors of students. Such examples would be tolerance and anti-harassment programs or curricula within the school and communities, greater awareness of school policies and procedures against
violence and harassment, and the creation of a more holistic environment which encompasses all students and teaches them to work together than apart.

Thankfully, school districts have implemented programs that promote a more civil society of safer and higher tolerant school environments where learning takes more precedence over being bullied, harassed, or worried about being victimized by a violent act. To continue moving this new environment forward, Bulach (2002) states that students, teachers and administrators should practice more civil and moral behaviors, and should continue this process into the community. One superintendent reported:

[The district] has now changed philosophies around punitive measures; we see they don’t work. Restitution and mediation processes do work. There is now more of a learning process and a greater awareness about the indicators of a troubled student. We now have different levels of counseling to deal with anti-social behaviors and also an addition to staff for this. Part of the shift has been from punitive (expulsion/detention) to finding the problem behind behavior to help students (Personal communication, May 2004).

The introduction of restitution and mediation is a comforting practice, and is on the cutting edge of criminal justice retribution to the public (Bazemore and Schiff, 2001). Another superintendent affirmed that his school district has created age appropriate curriculums that promote tolerance and understanding to all students.

Another area district has introduced a community wide effort to combat bullying. The Proctor School District has partnered with the Proctor police to deter bullying before it becomes a problem. The program is called “Respect and Peace in Schools” (RAPS), and has been bringing awareness about bullying to the Proctor School District and community for over a year. The purpose of the program is to bring students, teachers, parents, community members, bus drivers, administrators, probation and parole officers, social workers, and police officers together to combat bullying and network collective concerns about what to look for in potentially troubled students. With the community involvement, Proctor School District believes they can combat any bullying or harassment threats towards the students of their school in order to create a safe and healthy learning environment (Proctor Journal, 2004). Truly, this district has taken a giant step in order to combat the fight against wilding in their school.
With this glimmer of hope, a civil society can fall upon this district, along with all the other schools in the nation, including Columbine.

**Conclusion**

In addition to proving whether or not schools have become more violent over the past few years; the paper also presented evidence both for and against the original hypothesis that wilding can help address the current issues seen with school violence. Overwhelming evidence shows policies and the media only make it appear school violence is rising. Indeed the means of violence has changed; however, almost everyday incidents are not to the celebrity case level. Evidence provided in this study suggests schools are safe places for children to learn and grow. If tolerance can be taught, along with providing a common sense approach to violence and harassment, schools have a shining chance to excel and become even safer.

Even though the paper addresses main concerns about school violence, problems did arise with the research. First, the interview questions were more policy-based; however, the questions had to be conscious of students’ privacy. Another problem was that the school districts in the area studied tend to have similar demographic information and, for the most part, are rural schools. This could have proved to be a bias against national studies, especially ones with different socioeconomic and ethnic factors. Future studies could even focus on comparisons between inner city and rural schools to see if wilding alone contributes to the increase in recent school violence. Maybe a swing in media attention plays a big role, and by focusing on middle class school and inner city school violence, that point could be brought out. Finally, the interview pool was very small compared to other studies of related issues. The intention was to query five school district superintendents, but only three interviews were conducted due to time restraints.

It must be reiterated that wilding and its relationship to school violence is a very new concept. It was difficult to find literature and previous research about this theory and the ways it can help explain school violence. This research paper is in the foreground of future studies and more literature will be written about this subject. After all, the main goal of any community and school is to maintain or reach a high level of safety and security and promote an environment that teaches tolerance and belonging rather than one of intolerance and violence.
Appendices

Appendix A

Survey Questions

The questions were as follows:

1) How would you describe your district by demographics, populations, discipline problems in comparison to other similar sized schools, and educational barriers?

2) Pre-Columbine. What did your school look for with troubled students—checklist, profiling, etc? Or did your school even worry about troubled students becoming violent? Feelings?

3) Post-Columbine. Now what does your school look for with troubled students—checklist, profiling, etc? Feelings?

4) Pre-Columbine. Did your school have any violence prevention programs? How effective were they? Feelings?

5) Post-Columbine. What are your violence prevention programs now? How effective are they? Feelings?

6) Pre-Columbine. What were your tolerance policies like towards violence before Columbine? Punishment? Feelings?

7) Post-Columbine. What are your tolerance policies now? No-tolerance? Feelings?

8) Pre-Columbine. What were your policies before Columbine regarding weapons in school? What was considered a “weapon?” Feelings?

9) Post-Columbine. What are your policies about weapons now? What is now considered weapons? Feelings?

10) Pre-Columbine. What were your security procedures/policies pre-Columbine? What happened if they were breached? Feelings?

11) Post-Columbine. What are your security procedures/policies now? What happens now if they are breached? Feelings?

12) Do you have any other additional comments regarding policies or any helpful handouts that could explain the policies better?
Appendix B

1) Verbatim Survey Results
Have them describe district—demographics, population, etc. Discipline problems? Educational barriers? Etc.

Superintendent #1: Discipline—average school district in terms of suspensions, detentions, or expulsions. Educational—lower spending district, have problems obtaining the proper technology, programming, and resources needed. Manage to keep class sizes to an acceptable level.

Superintendent #2: Discipline—We have fairly similar rates of discipline problems as other schools of our size. We have kids being expelled in 2004, in general, that wouldn’t have been 25 years ago. Weapons such as knives, squirt guns, or other facsimiles of guns all play a part. Fear and the potential of a disaster has changed our outlook against weapons. Educational—The advantage to having a school at a certain size is most teachers will know most students by their name by the time they are the graduating senior class. On average this will be true for 80-90% of the students. We like the networking between students and teachers.

Superintendent #3: Discipline—Non-violent types of discipline—wide range from absenteeism and truancy to cheating/plagiarism. “Violent”—Destruction of property/vandalism of washroom, breaking of equipment, sabotage of equipment. Violent—Assault and fighting are average compared to other districts. We are also seeing more females become involved in violence in comparison to 20 years ago. Educational—There are more hurdles between the strong tie between social economics and achievement. If a child is less prepared for school it’s not because of inherited intelligence, but due to poverty. There is a statistical correlation between socioeconomic and achievement not intelligence. More disadvantaged to being exposed to Pre-K experience that help achieved at grade level.

2) Pre-Columbine
What did your school look for with troubled students—checklist, profiling, etc? Or did your school even worry about troubled students becoming violent? Feelings?

Superintendent #1: Dealt with on an individual basis. Most perpetrators were special need children—emotionally disabled (anti-social behavior)—would first send them to special programming to meet disability.
behavior continued, the student was identified by having a certain pattern by demonstrating behavioral problems. They would be rerouted through counseling or principle assessment process. It would be a more punitive (suspension/detention) punishment with the cooperation of the parent’s help. Finally, a liaison officer would intervene if the offence was severe enough to be an actual city ordinance violation or a state statute violation. Results of this would have been more counseling to incarceration.

Superintendent #2: School had varying behaviors at certain degrees especially with fights and disagreements. Special Ed students would be given the label. Columbine shocked us all by the degree of violence.

Superintendent #3: There was no general checklist or profiling. In the 80s and 90s there was concern for students who acted out and had visible behavior that looked threatening, for example loud threatening remarks. We were looking for the more obvious. In the 80s a concerns started to heighten to take firmer stance on firearms on school grounds. Outward aggressiveness was looked at more and we were less concerned about inner turmoil.

3) Post-Columbine
Now what does your school look for with troubled students—checklist, profiling, etc? Feelings?

Superintendent #1: There is now a greater awareness of certain words and actions by students who are isolated or anti social. There might have been slight overreaction as behaviors looked as okay before, such as playing cops and robbers and shooting at each other, are now unacceptable. However, teachers are more cognizant for a movement to make better relationships between all students and staff. Verbalization is also looked at more seriously now, and it creates a greater intensity and draws more attention.

Superintendent #2: Threats are taken more seriously. If the aggression is frequent or severe they will take steps to make students not students there anymore.

Superintendent #3: Same response at question 2, but we’re more sensitive to comments to friends and peers that reflect deep unhappiness or desire to extract revenge go an “I’m getting picked on, and going to stop it.” Still no checklist or profiling. After child is spotted with concern, such as an academic fall off, extreme increase in absenteeism, or avoidance behavior. Once a student is referred then we use assessment.
4) Pre-Columbine
Did your school have any violence prevention programs? How effective were they? Feelings?

Superintendent #1: There were counseling programs that the pupil would be referred to. If a student was demonstrating anti-social behaviors the principle or counselor dealt with it. However, there was a mediation resolution program already in place.

Superintendent #2: There has always been a curriculum in place regarding mental health issues, such as getting a long with each other, and why we act the way we do. Focus was more intense in health classes.

Superintendent #3: In the late 80s and 90s most school districts in Minnesota paid more attention to harassment, bullying, and intimidation/agression. Policies will be as effective as the district can supervise and punish/enforce. Most policies may err on the fact of follow up rather than preventive programs.

5) Post-Columbine
What are your violence prevention programs now? How effective are they? Feelings?

Superintendent #1: We’ve now changed philosophies around punitive measures; we see they don’t work. Restitution and mediation processes do work. There is now more of a learning process and a greater awareness about the indicators of a troubled student. We now have different levels of counseling to deal with anti-social behaviors and also an addition to staff for this. Part of the shift has been from punitive (expulsion/detention) to finding the problem behind behavior to help students.

Superintendent #2: The legislature mandates that we have an adaptive policy.

Superintendent #3: We now have a harassment and violence coordinator. The district has acknowledged and set about finding an age appropriate programs to introduce and implement programs at age specific and appropriate areas.

6) Pre-Columbine
What were your tolerance policies like towards violence before Columbine? Punishment? Feelings?
Superintendent #1: Violence dealt with on punitive manner depending on the degree student could get suspension to expulsion.

Superintendent #2: The underlying assumption was as long as student was in compliance with the law, there wasn’t much difference between in and out of school policy. We felt that individuals had a right not to be harassed and it must be put in the school handbook. Student must be protected. This area of harassment specifically began to grow in the early 90s in terms of students being free from the fear of being degraded or beat up.

Superintendent #3: We followed similar policies that evolved in the 80s. There was a firearms act that evolved from the late 70s and early 80s. In 1991, all schools had to have a violence and harassment policy in place.

7) Post-Columbine
What are your tolerance policies now? No-tolerance? Feelings?

Superintendent #1: Big focus on bullying and harassment. More intervention to investigate complaints on verbalizations (calling someone gay) and is not accepted anymore. We are working on bringing more understanding on tolerance by helping empower students more in decision-making processes to help give more control over their lives. We look at individual cause and effects to create a picture to help environment of school district and students involved.

Superintendent #2: With the policies significantly different now, we have to enforce it. However, we take a more common sense approach. For example, we won’t expel a student for an entire year for an inadvertent act with no malicious attempt to injure or kill. If districts are complacent about student’s complaints and if they don’t take action, it could be sued.

Superintendent #3: We claim to be “zero”-tolerant, but it never stops the incident from happening. Each incident of violence and weapons will have consequences. Some schools not many zero-tolerance meant once you violated you couldn’t come anymore. Few schools have zero-tolerance means your out. Young people guaranteed right to fair education.

8) Pre-Columbine
What were your policies before Columbine regarding weapons in school? What was considered a “weapon?” Feelings?

Superintendent #1: Stun guns, knives—revolving door. Anything that can cause bodily damage as long as intent is behind the object. There were
very few kids who didn’t have knives in their pocket (pocketknives, Swiss army).

Superintendent #2: As long as the weapon was legal in the community by being in compliance with the law, it was okay on school grounds. That means the gun had to be unloaded and in a closing case.

Superintendent #3: Similar as question 6—virtually same policies before Columbine.

9) Post-Columbine
What are your policies about weapons now? What is now considered weapons? Feelings?

Superintendent #1: We have a paradox of stricter policies versus common sense and mediation. School district moving back to common sense views with the feelings of overreaction. Kids still do some “aggressive” behavior before and after Columbine. Kids are still kids. Even an “A” student could get in trouble for horseplay and give a bump to another student. That’s why we prefer mediation.

Superintendent #2: A weapon means any object, device, or instrument designed as a weapon through its use is capable of threatening or producing bodily harm or which may be used to inflict self-injury including, but not limited to, any firearm, whether loaded or unloaded; airguns; pellet guns; bb guns; all knives; blades;… nunchucks; throwing stars; [laser pointers or any object that is a facsimile of a real weapon] and any object that have been modified to serve as a weapon (School Weapons Policy, 1995). Take it to heart. Definition of a weapon has changed dramatically.

Superintendent #3: Very similar now—school book policy, standard.

10) Pre-Columbine
What were your security procedures/policies pre-Columbine? What happened if they were breached? Feelings?

Superintendent #1: Security issues weren’t looked at with a discerning eye. Strangers could get lost and parents could know their way around. Had crisis plans around for tornadoes, fires, environmental disasters, and air raids.

Superintendent #2: Our security measures were minimal. There might have been a sticker wanting visitors to report to the office. There was sometimes a teacher or student acting as a hall monitor.
Superintendent #3: Security measures consisted of wanting to have visitors check into office. We had teachers as hall monitors. Police officers at large games and dances sponsored by schools. No metal detectors, wands (airport wands). Secondary schools looked more for non-violent invasions or visits, mostly from homecoming and rival football teams. We would also lock doors during warmer weather to deter truancy and skipping.

11) Post-Columbine
What are your security procedures/policies now? What happens now if they are breached? Feelings?

Superintendent #1: Now if we have a visitor without a pass, they could be arrested. Our middle school students are required to wear student id’s around their neck (thought he didn’t seem particularly crazy about that requirement). We now practice three different levels of intruders and have color codes that could potentially move into a lockdown. We have metal detectors at special events, mostly to keep kids from the outside, who pose the biggest threat, from any sort of violence. However, if a pupil still wants to shoot someone they will, regardless, go through with it.

Superintendent #2: We took a team of 10 staff to San Antonio to a “Safe School’s Initiative” in the aftermath of Columbine. It was a federal workshop on what doors to keep locked, where to have video surveillance, where to and not to plant shrubbery, and so forth. We now practice lockdowns by teaching students how to clear hallways, lock doors, and cover visuals into room. This was never considered 10 years ago. We also have an addition of a police liaison officer whom is very prevalent in our district.

Superintendent #3: We now have increased security by stationing supervisors in main entrances to receive guests. We want to welcome parents in but don’t know all the parents, so we try to be open and welcoming while maintaining secure measures. We also limit the number of doors open at all times.

12) Anything additional and handouts regarding policies—list of discipline of students (number of suspensions, detentions, expulsions for violence)—etc.?
Student handbooks and policies hold true for all these. I received some additional resources that will be used in discussion. Please note, as one superintendent stated the student handbook policies, regardless of state, are very similar in content and are uniformly
standard due to national legislation. (Due to space constraints, I cannot go into further detail).

Superintendent #3: Minnesota legislature in 1999 session made schools to address crisis management policies from tornadoes, chemical clouds, bomb threats, and hostile. In 1990 to 1991, Minnesota legislature endorsed harassment policies. There is legislation on bullying and intimidation policies on the floor this year.
Works Cited


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