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The Search for Truth at Columbine

Peter Langman, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the massive media coverage and in-depth investigation by law enforcement of the attack at Columbine High School, there has been a great deal of confusion about Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. To start with an apparently simple example, were Eric and Dylan fans of Marilyn Manson? In the immediate wake of the attack, the *Washington Times* reported that Harris and Klebold “admired the Gothic scene and Satan worship, sometimes donning makeup in the style of one of their heroes, shock rock star Marilyn Manson.”¹ In an article on the fifth anniversary of Columbine, however, another reporter stated, “Klebold and Harris hated Marilyn Manson.”² Unfortunately, the evidence for this statement is not cited. It may have come from a student who was quoted in yet another article: “I heard somebody saying they loved Marilyn Manson . . . They both hated Marilyn Manson. The people who are saying things like that didn’t know them.”³

This is an example of problematic reporting, where different sources present conflicting information. This kind of conflicting reporting occurs frequently in the material on Columbine, posing significant challenges to anyone seeking reliable information.

Before proceeding, let’s resolve the issue of Marilyn Manson. Based on the evidence now available it seems that all of the above reports are wrong. The student quoted above who said Eric and Dylan hated Marilyn Manson was more of an acquaintance than a close friend. We have statements from more trustworthy sources, and they tell a different story.

First, what do we know about Eric and Marilyn Manson? According to a girl from his psychology class, Eric and Dylan

did a project focused on Marilyn Manson and Jeffrey Dahmer.⁴ This indicates a certain interest in and knowledge about Marilyn Manson. In a telephone conversation between two of Eric’s good friends, they stated that Eric didn’t listen to Marilyn Manson.⁵ This, however, is contradicted by a better source: Eric Harris.

In a school assignment Eric lamented that people often do not pay attention to the lyrics of the songs they listen to. He stressed the importance of listening to the lyrics of such bands as “Rammstein, KMFDM, NIN [Nine Inch Nails], M.M.”⁶ In this context, M.M. almost certainly stood for Marilyn Manson, and Eric included him in the same list as his favorite bands. Thus, though he was not a fanatical follower of Manson, it appears that Eric was a fan of Manson’s music.

What about Dylan? First, we know that when law enforcement searched the Klebold residence, they found a Marilyn Manson CD.⁷ We also know that a friend of Dylan’s who spoke to him daily stated that Dylan liked Marilyn Manson.⁸ Also, the same two friends who commented that Eric didn’t listen to Manson noted that Dylan did.⁹ Finally, we have the testimony of Mrs. Klebold that Dylan listened to Marilyn Manson, talked to her about why he liked the music, and had a poster of Manson in his room.¹⁰

Thus, though there is no evidence that Eric and Dylan imitated the makeup of Marilyn Manson, there is evidence that they listened to his music. Though this may be a minor point, it demonstrates how difficult it is to make definitive statements about Eric and Dylan. Even friends of theirs who claimed to have inside information were often wrong. We have to be very careful about taking any statement at face value.

Most school shooters are difficult to investigate due to a lack of information. In the case of Columbine, however, there is an overwhelming amount of information, including over 27,000

pages of documents from the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office (JCSO), most of which can be found online. These documents contain the reports of thousands of interviews, including most of the students in the school, teachers and administrators, and people from the community who knew Eric and Dylan, as well as their journals and other documents.

Even though an overwhelming amount of information is available, there are still materials that have not been made public. Several thousand pages of the JCSO documents are unreleased. The videos that Eric and Dylan made about the attack, known as the Basement Tapes, have been shown to a few people, but only brief excerpts and descriptions of their content have been made public. And in April 2007, depositions from Mr. and Mrs. Harris and Mr. and Mrs. Klebold were sealed by a judge for another twenty years. Thus, even nine years after the attack, we are still left without important information.

The challenge that a researcher faces is to sort through the mass of information that is currently available and make as much sense of it as possible. This is not easy. There are contradictions, misconceptions, confusion, and controversies.

Though perhaps two thousand people were interviewed, people's memories are far from perfect, especially under stress. The day of the attack was probably the most stressful day in the lives of everyone at the school. Also, what is it like to be a teenager whose friend or classmate has just committed mass murder? How do you make sense of that? Do you decide that such an act must have been in response to something else, and look for problems in the home or at school?

And how does this process of coming to terms with a tragedy the magnitude of Columbine affect how you describe the perpetrators? Do you downplay their bad points to make sense of the fact that you were friends with them? Or do you exaggerate their bad points to construct a more coherent interpretation of reality? And how do you present things when you are under suspicion for possibly knowing about the plan and might be facing arrest yourself?

PROBLEMATIC REPORTING

A significant problem with student reports is that some of the students interviewed by the media apparently did not know Eric and Dylan, or knew them only as kids who sometimes wore trench coats. As a result, people assumed that Eric and Dylan were part of the Trench Coat Mafia (TCM); this assumption is wrong. Thus, when talking about Eric and Dylan, some students confused them with other people who wore trench coats or were considered misfits. The Washington Post stated: "In recent days, the pair seemed even odder than before – at least in retrospect, students said. 'You would see them sort of marching down the hall together with their berets, dark glasses, their boots and their makeup.'"¹¹

This statement is supposedly about Eric and Dylan, but based on the internal evidence, it cannot be about them. Eric

and Dylan did not wear berets; neither did they wear makeup. There was a boy named Chris who did wear a trench coat and a beret.¹² There were also boys who wore trench coats and used makeup.¹³ In fact, a boy named Robert who wore black nail polish¹⁴ was about the same height as Dylan, was thin like Dylan, and wore his hair the same way as Dylan. At least one student reported that she got the two boys mixed up.¹⁵ During the attack, several students thought Robert was one of the shooters because of his resemblance to Dylan. The student quoted in the article confused Eric and Dylan with other kids.

More significantly, there were rumors that Eric and Dylan, along with members of the Trench Coat Mafia, were gay. When reporter Dave Cullen investigated this, however, he found that "the stories were generally vague, secondhand, and never from students who personally knew members of the group."¹⁶ A student stated that Eric and Dylan "would touch each other in school. People have seen them. One of them went up to a kid I know and did that" (he demonstrated grabbing his crotch). When asked if that were Eric or Dylan, the student said, "I don't know," adding that it was "people in the group." Thus, behavior that was engaged in by members of the Trench Coat Mafia was attributed to Eric and Dylan because they wore trench coats.

There are, in fact, reports in the JCSO material of Trench Coat Mafia members grabbing crotches in front of people, and of males kissing each other publicly,¹⁷ but none that Eric or Dylan engaged in such behavior. Just to add to the confusion, one of the boys in the Trench Coat Mafia who engaged in this provocative sexual behavior was named Eric. This may be the source of some of the confusion – there were two boys named Eric who wore trench coats. One of them engaged in public homosexual behavior. The other one – Eric Harris – did not.

The same student who was just quoted also said that the Trench Coat Mafia kids were made fun of, and lumped Eric and Dylan in with the TCM: "They [Eric and Dylan] were in the Trench Coat Mafia, and that's something around our school that we consider freaks."¹⁸ He said that as a result, Eric and Dylan were picked on. Yet, Eric and Dylan were not in the Trench Coat Mafia, and this student could not talk about them apart from that identification. He said Eric and Dylan were gay and that they were picked on for being in the TCM, but when pushed on the issue, could not be sure he even knew which kids he was talking about.

Similarly, *Time Magazine* reported the following:

"Columbine is a clean, good place except for those rejects," Todd says of Klebold and Harris and their friends. "Most kids didn't want them there. They were into witchcraft. They were into voodoo dolls. Sure, we teased them. But what do you expect with kids who come to school with weird hairdos and horns on their hats? ... They're a bunch of homos, grabbing each other's private parts. If you want to get rid of someone, usually you tease 'em. So the whole school would call them homos."¹⁹

This passage could easily be used to support the idea that

Eric and Dylan were persecuted, but that would be a mistake. Who is this student talking about? The reporters' comment says he was talking about "Klebold and Harris and their friends," but nothing that the student said applied to Eric and Dylan. They were not into witchcraft. They were not into voodoo. They did not have weird hairdos. They did not wear horns on their hats. They did not grab each other's crotches. There were kids at Columbine who did these things, but Eric and Dylan were not among them. Thus, we again see a student apparently talking about Eric and Dylan, but confusing them with all the students who were considered misfits, outcasts, or members of the Trench Coat Mafia.

The examples presented above were not the only problematic reports; such errors were rampant in the aftermath of the attack. The lesson of this section is that we cannot accept all testimony as valid. This is why it so difficult to determine what really happened at Columbine.

MINING THE DATA

This section attempts to establish a clearer picture of Eric, Dylan, and Columbine High School than what is generally presented in the media. The primary source of information will be the 20,000 pages of documentation released by the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office (JCSO).

There Were No Targets

Eric and Dylan did not plan the attack on Columbine High School as a school shooting. It was to be a much bigger attack involving several steps. To begin, Eric and Dylan planted bombs away from the school to distract law enforcement officials. These bombs caused no damage.²⁰ The main element of the attack involved bombs in the school cafeteria. If these bombs had detonated, they might have killed hundreds of people.²¹ What was supposed to happen next is not clear. Perhaps Eric and Dylan planned to shoot people as they fled the building, or maybe they would have entered the building and shot survivors. As a last deadly assault, Eric and Dylan had bombs in their cars. These were supposed to detonate after the attack, potentially killing parents, media, law enforcement, and rescue workers who had arrived.²² Understanding the magnitude of the attack is essential to understanding the next point.

Despite early reports to the contrary, the attack was not targeted toward jocks, Christians, minorities, or any particular individual or group. The attack Eric and Dylan planned would have killed a massive number of people – there were no specific targets. Even Eric and Dylan's friends would have been likely victims. Dylan videotaped Eric saying, "Morris, Nate – if you guys live I want you to have whatever you want from my room."²³ Chris Morris and Nate Dykeman were two of his best friends. When Eric said, "if you guys live," he demonstrated his willingness to kill everyone, including his own friends. The

attack was not directed at anyone in particular; the goal was to kill as many people as possible.

When the bombs in the cafeteria failed to detonate, Eric and Dylan entered the school and began shooting. The comments they made in the school led to the impression that specific groups of people were targeted. They told all jocks to stand up; they also, however, yelled for everyone to stand up. Some of the people they shot were jocks, but most were not.

They taunted an African American student before shooting him, referring to him as "nigger." This suggested that minorities were targeted. A careful review of Eric and Dylan's behavior, however, shows that they taunted people for anything they could before shooting them. They seemed to want to not only kill, but to humiliate their victims. Thus, an overweight person was taunted for being fat, a person who wore glasses was taunted about the glasses, and so on.²⁴ There was no systematic seeking out of particular people, just hurtful, humiliating comments about anyone they encountered.

As noted by one reporter, "Several of the injured and dead had scarcely been at Columbine long enough to make friends, let alone enemies, and had never even met the killers."²⁵ In pondering Eric's and Dylan's motives and behavior, a story in *Time Magazine* asked, "Why, if their motive was rage at the athletes who taunted them, didn't they take their guns and bombs to the locker room? Because retaliation against specific people was not the point."²⁶

Eric Liked School

Many people assume that Eric must have hated school – why else would he want to blow it up? Yet, there is evidence that he actually enjoyed school. He also went out of his way to exonerate the school from blame. In talking about the upcoming attack, he wrote, "Don't blame the school . . . the administration is doing a fine job."²⁷ If he were tormented as badly as has usually been claimed, it would be odd for him to free the school from blame and praise the administration.

In addition, when Eric wrote a list of things he loved and things he hated, he wrote the following: "You know what I love? School!"²⁸ Stating that he loved school casts doubt on the belief that Eric was so badly treated that he was driven to blow up the school. He gave no indication that he hated his classes or the social life at school. Eric was a dedicated student who generally maintained good grades, even as he was planning the destruction of the school. One reason he had for liking school was his social network. This will be discussed below.

Another probable reason he liked school was that it was a forum in which he experienced success. His academic success validated his sense of himself as intelligent and superior. For example, a classmate said Eric "was so . . . involved in class, always had his hand up . . . he knew every single answer. Grammar, Shakespeare, class discussion on whatever."²⁹ Another student said that Eric was looked up to because he was smart.³⁰

Eric's teachers appreciated his interest and motivation. His

Government/Economics teacher commented on Eric's report card, "positive attitude and good cooperation."³¹ So did his chemistry teacher.³² So did his German teacher.³³ His American literature teacher made the same comment, and added "strong interest and participation."³⁴ On a progress report, his government/economics teacher wrote, "Eric is doing awesome!"³⁵ Rather than hating school, it appears that Eric thrived in class because he experienced success and validation for his intelligence.

The Scope of Eric's Fantasies

To focus solely on Eric's actual attack is to ignore the extent of his homicidal thoughts. His fantasies of violence ran wild, far beyond the scope of jocks or kids he didn't like. Sometimes he thought about destroying Denver or local neighborhoods:

I live in Denver, and god damnit I would love to kill almost all of its residents. Fucking people with their rich snobby attitude thinking they are all high and mighty.³⁶

God I want to torch and level everything in this whole fucking area ... imagine THAT you fuckers, picture half of Denver on fire just from me and Vodka [Vodka was Dylan's nickname]. Napalm on sides of skyscrapers and car garages blowing up from exploded gas tanks ... oh man that would be beautiful.³⁷

[After attacking the school] we will hijack some awesome car, and drive off to the neighborhood of our choice and start torching houses with molotov cocktails. By that time cops will be all over us and we start to kill them too!³⁸

If we have figured out the art of time bombs before hand, we will set hundreds of them around houses, roads, bridges, buildings and gas stations, anything that will cause damage and chaos ... It'll be like the LA riots, the Oklahoma bombing, WWII, Vietnam ... all mixed together. Maybe we will even start a little rebellion or revolution to fuck things up as much as we can.³⁹

Sometimes Eric thought in even larger terms, such as attacking an unspecified major city:

I'll just go to some downtown area in some big ass city and blow up and shoot everything I can ... I will rig up explosives all over a town and detonate each one of them at will after I mow down a whole fucking area of you snotty ass rich mother fucking high strung godlike attitude having worthless pieces of shit whores. I don't care if I live or die in the shootout, all I want to do is kill and injure as many of you pricks as I can.⁴⁰

Long before the Al Qaeda attack on September 11, 2001, Eric dreamed about a similar attack on New York:

We will hijack a hell of a lot of bombs and crash a plane into NYC with us inside firing away as we go down. Just

something to cause more devastation.⁴¹

Sometimes Eric seemed to think that he was capable of overpowering entire countries:

And to you assholes in Iraq and Iran and all those other little piece of shit desert lands who hate us, shut up and die! We will kick your ass if you try to fuck with us or at least I will!⁴²

Eric even thought larger than attacking individual nations, sometimes fantasizing about eliminating almost everyone in the world:

Our actions are a two-man war against everyone else.⁴³

Hmm, just thinking if I want all humans dead or maybe just the quote-unquote "civilized, developed, and known-of" places on Earth, maybe leave little tribes of natives in the rain forest or something. Hmm, I'll think about that.⁴⁴

No one is worthy of this planet, only me and who ever I choose ... Everyone should be shot out into space and only those people I say should be left behind.⁷³

Before I leave this *worthless* place, I will kill who ever I deem unfit.⁴⁵

If I could nuke the world I would, because so far I hate you all. There are probably around 10 people I wouldn't want to die.⁴⁷

I have a goal to destroy as much as possible.... I want to burn the world, I want to kill everyone except about 5 people, who I will name later, so if you are reading this you are lucky you escaped my rampage because I wanted to kill you.⁴⁸

Sometimes, Eric thought globally, thinking that that all humans should be exterminated.

I think we are all a waste of natural resources and should be killed off, and since humans have the ability to choose ... and I'm human ... I think I will choose to kill and damage as much as nature allows me to.⁴⁹

If you recall your history the Nazis came up with a "final solution" to the Jewish problem. Kill them all. Well, in case you haven't figured it out yet, I say "KILL MANKIND" no one should survive.⁵⁰

Eric's goal in life was to commit as much destruction as possible. As he put it, "I want to burn the world."⁵¹

Eric's Reasons for Murder

If the attack was not revenge against jocks, then why did Eric go on his rampage? Eric made numerous statements about why people should be killed.

1. He is the law

My belief is that if I say something, it goes. I am the law, if you don't like it, you die.⁵²

2. To solve arguments

That's the only way to solve arguments with all you fuck-heads out there, I just kill!⁵³

3. Because he doesn't like someone

If I don't like you ... you die.⁵⁴

4. Because he doesn't like what someone tells him to do

[If] I don't like what you want me to do, you die.⁵⁵

5. To get rid of snobs

I live in denver, and god damnit I would love to kill almost all of its residents. Fucking people with their rich snobby attitude.⁵⁶

6. To rid the earth of inferior people (assist natural selection)

I would get rid of all the fat, retarded, crippled, stupid, dumb, ignorant, worthless people of this world.⁵⁷

7. Gays don't deserve to live

ALL gays, should be killed.⁵⁸

8. Human race doesn't deserve to live

The human race isn't worth fighting for, only worth killing.⁵⁹

I say "KILL MANKIND" no one should survive.⁶⁰

9. Just because?

Someones bound to say "what were they thinking" ... I have a goal to destroy as much as possible ... I want to burn the world.⁶¹

10. Hatred

If I could nuke the world I would, because so far I hate you all.⁶²

11. Sadistic pleasure

I want to tear a throat out with my own teeth like a pop can. I want to gut someone with my hand, to tear a head off and rip out the heart and lungs from the neck, to stab someone in the gut, shove it up to their heart, and yank the fucking blade out of their rib cage! I want to grab some weak little freshman and just tear them apart like a wolf, show them who is god. Strangle them, squish their head, bite their temples in the skull, rip off their jaw, rip of their collar bones, break their arms in half and twist them around, the lovely sounds of bones cracking and flesh ripping, ahhh ... so much to do and so little chances.⁶³

12. Revenge

Everyone is always making fun of me because of how I look, how fucking weak I am and shit, well I will get you all back, ultimate fucking revenge here.⁶⁴

It is interesting that out of a dozen reasons for killing people, only one had to do with being picked on. The others had to do with Eric's grandiosity and his contempt for others. Thus, murder was not simply a method of revenge for Eric. It was a way to play God.

Not Social Outcasts

The image of Eric and Dylan as isolated, ostracized kids lurking on the periphery of their peer group may be deeply ingrained, but it is wrong. In the words of Dave Cullen:

Perhaps the most pervasive myth is that Harris and Klebold were rejected outcasts. They were not captains of the football team, but they were far more accepted than many of their schoolmates. They hung out with a tight circle of close friends and partied regularly on the weekend with a wider crowd.⁶⁵

Another reporter noted, "Several students who knew Klebold and Harris as classmates or even as friends have trouble with the notion that they were really outcasts at all."⁶⁶ In order to demonstrate how well connected they were socially, and how engaged in a variety of activities, we need to examine several areas of their lives. The following sections involve many names of peers; there is no need to keep track of them all. They are provided in order to demonstrate that Eric and Dylan were socially involved far beyond what is generally recognized.

MALE AND FEMALE FRIENDS

Two of Eric's and Dylan's best friends were Chris M. and Nate; the four boys joined together to be a team in a bowling class at school.⁶⁷ Zach was another good friend. When Eric and Dylan went on their Rebel Missions – midnight escapades of mischief and vandalism, Zach often joined them.⁶⁸ Zach was also a partner in crime when Eric and Dylan hacked into the school computer system (discussed below). He and Dylan often got drunk together.⁶⁹ Zach said that he talked to Dylan every night.⁷⁰

Eric had a group of friends in German class, including Kristi, Chris W., and Monica.⁷¹ Chris W. was a jock, but Eric liked him. Eric tried to get him to buy him a gun, and even though Chris refused, they remained friends.⁷²

When Eric had a birthday party shortly before the attack, he and a group of friends got together at a restaurant. The group included Dylan, Cory, Chris M., Nicole, and perhaps others.⁷³ Nicole enjoyed the party and commented that Eric was really funny.⁷⁴ In fact, Eric used to hang out with Nicole and other friends at her house; her mother said Eric "seemed very sweet. Played Nintendo, laughed, had a good time. Joked, drank soda

pop, had hot dogs. All-around good kid.”⁷⁵

Dylan and Brooks had been friends since first grade, and Eric became friends with Brooks in high school. For a while, Dylan played drums in a band with Brooks.⁷⁶ Nick was another long-term friend of Dylan’s, having known each other since third grade.⁷⁷ Dylan was friends with a boy named Richard; their families knew each other and they went to baseball games together.⁷⁸ Three unidentified friends helped Eric and Dylan create Eric’s website. They are referred to on the website as Excaliber, Imaginos, and Jester.⁷⁹ Excaliber reportedly was a friend of Dylan’s from the theatre department.⁸⁰ The identities of the other two friends remain unknown.

Another boy from the theatre department had a Christmas party that Dylan attended.⁸¹ John, another theatre student, was also a friend of Dylan’s, though they did not socialize outside of school.⁸² A boy named Timothy considered himself good friends with Eric and Dylan, and Dylan had gone to his birthday party in 1998.⁸³ A boy named Matt was a friend of Dylan’s who worked in a video store; he once brought a movie Dylan requested and watched it at Dylan’s house along with another friend of Dylan’s named David.⁸⁴ Eric C. was good friends with Dylan; they would hang out in the cafeteria, play cards, and talk about sports and music.⁸⁵ Another boy who hung with Dylan was Chris L.⁸⁶ Mr. and Mrs. Klebold estimated that Dylan had sleepovers at various friends’ houses once or twice a month.⁸⁷ Friends often stayed over at Dylan’s house, too, referring to the Klebold home as their “country house.”⁸⁸ In fact, Nate spent so much time at Dylan’s house that he said the Klebolds were like a second set of parents to him.⁸⁹

Eric dated a number of girls in high school. He took Tiffany on a double-date to the homecoming in freshman year.⁹⁰ Valerie said she was Eric’s girlfriend in 1996.⁹¹ Sasha estimated she went on sixteen to twenty dates with Eric.⁹² Sherry dated Eric for about three weeks⁹³, and another girl estimated she dated Eric maybe three times.⁹⁴ Eric dated Kathryn once.⁹⁵ A few nights before the attack, a girl named Susan spent the evening at Eric’s house; they watched a movie and he put his arm around her and gave her a goodnight kiss.⁹⁶

Besides dating, however, Eric had other female companionship. Early in high school, Jennifer H. used to go to the mall and to parties with Eric, but this stopped in tenth grade.⁹⁷ Kim, a girl in school, regularly gave him hugs in the morning. When Eric complained that he looked “stupid” in his class photos, Kim and another friend, Sara, told him that he was “cute” and helped him pick out his photos. When Eric complained that other girls avoided him, Kim and Sara invited him to hang out with them.⁹⁸ Two other girls, Kristi and Alyssa, also invited Eric to hang out with them and get together outside of school. Kristi and Eric also wrote each other notes in class, and Eric asked her for advice about girls.⁹⁹ Kristi and Alyssa had been to his house twice to take him out with them.¹⁰⁰

Eric was also friends with Robyn, and she had been to his house. Robyn bought him a shirt for his birthday shortly before the attack, and he attended her birthday party in March, 1999.¹⁰¹ A couple of weeks before the attack, Eric went to lunch with

several girls (on perhaps more than one occasion), including Jessica, Kathryn, Lauren, and Veronica.¹⁰²

Many girls commented that Eric treated them nicely. Melissa said, “I used to talk to Eric once in a while . . . He was like the sweetest guy I ever knew.”¹⁰³ Kate said that Eric helped her with geometry.¹⁰⁴ Alison said that Eric was kind and nice.¹⁰⁵ Jennifer said that Eric was always nice to her.¹⁰⁶

Eric was also friends with Becca; they sat together in class, cut class together, and once in March, 1999, they had lunch at Eric’s house.¹⁰⁷ The day before the attack, Eric, Dylan, and Brooks went to lunch with Becca.¹⁰⁸ Eric was also friends with a couple of drug-involved girls. One was Jennifer, who may have sold him cocaine.¹⁰⁹ Another was Stephanie, who hung out with Eric and Dylan at the “smoker’s pit” where they smoked marijuana and talked.¹¹⁰ Another girl, Jeanette, occasionally went with Eric to a friend’s house, and Eric attended a party at her house.¹¹¹ Eric was also friends with Sarah; he had signed her yearbook the previous year and actually gave her a hug on the morning of the attack.¹¹² Eric also maintained contact with a girl he had been close to in sixth grade back in Plattsburgh, New York; in fact, after the attack, police found an unsent email he had written to her.¹¹³

Dylan was less successful with girls. By virtually all accounts, he was markedly shy. Nonetheless, despite reports that he never dated, the same Sasha who dated Eric said that she dated Dylan a couple of times in October, 1997.¹¹⁴ A girl named Sarah, who knew Dylan from the theatre department, said that Dylan had a crush on her; though she did not return his romantic feelings, she was a friend of his and they had long email conversations at night.¹¹⁵ Dylan reportedly knew a girl who worked at a store in a local mall. She said that he came by to visit her ten to twelve times and once asked her out.¹¹⁶

Dylan was friends with a girl named Devon; he went to her birthday party and visited her house several times.¹¹⁷ Dylan also went to the mall with Joanne and helped her with her homework.¹¹⁸ Dylan also made a good impression on other girls. Amanda said Dylan used to joke around and was kind of funny.¹¹⁹ Renee said that Dylan was nice and a “fun guy.”¹²⁰

Dylan was probably closest to Robyn, a girl with a 4.0 grade point average who was in the National Honor Society. Robyn invited him to the senior prom as a friend, and Dylan, though initially reluctant, did go with her. He and Robyn went to the prom in a limo with five other couples. Robyn said she typically called Dylan three times a week, and hung out at his house where they played pool and watched movies. They also studied calculus together.¹²¹ Thus, he had significant contact with at least a couple of girls, including Sarah and Robyn, as well as being friends and engaging in activities with a number of others.

COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Eric had an active life outside of school, including a couple of part-time jobs. He worked briefly at Tortilla Wraps, where his boss stated “He was a real nice kid . . . He was kind of quiet but everyone got along with him.”¹²² He also was friends with a girl named Jen who worked at Tortilla Wraps. He and Jen

engaged in long email conversations.¹²³ Chad said he worked with Dylan at Tortilla Wraps.¹²⁴

Eric's long-term employment, however, was at Blackjack's, a pizza shop. He and Dylan started there in the spring of their sophomore years, and they worked there until their deaths (though Dylan left for awhile and returned).¹²⁵ Several of their best friends also worked there, including Nate and Chris (their bowling team members), Kim and Sara (who invited Eric to hang out with them), Phil, Zach, Michelle, and Charles.¹²⁶ The friends often got rowdy and had wild times at work. Eric and Dylan would light fires behind the shop, and set off fireworks or homemade explosives. They also had playful fights, throwing water and flour at each other, though Dylan reportedly was too inhibited to join in.¹²⁷ When Eric said his final goodbyes on the Basement Tapes, he mentioned several friends from the pizza shop, including Jason, Chris, Angel, Phil, and Bob.¹²⁸

Dylan also worked briefly at Computer Renaissance.¹²⁹ Dylan and Eric were both part of the Rebel News Network at the school. Dylan was also an assistant in the computer lab and was involved in the theatre department, where he handled technical aspects of the productions.¹³⁰ Dylan attended a cast party for at least one of the shows he was involved with.¹³¹ Eric also was an assistant in the school's computer/video lab.¹³² Dylan, Zach, and Chris T. worked together to maintain the school's web server.¹³³ Eric and Dylan took video production classes at school and made several short films. They worked on these with a number of friends, including Michael, Chris W., and Eric V.¹³⁴ Yet another Eric, Eric J., said he was good friends with Dylan. Dylan was at his house the day before the attack to work on a video project.¹³⁵

SPORTS AND GAMES

Interestingly, given all the attention to the topic of jocks, there has been little notice of the fact that Eric was a jock. Besides playing in Little League when he was younger, Eric was a serious soccer player. He played in a local league for six years, right into his senior year of high school. In addition, he played on the Columbine soccer team as a freshman and sophomore.¹³⁶ Thus, Eric was a Columbine jock. A boy named Scott was good friends with Eric from a soccer team.¹³⁷ It was also reported that Eric played both after-school soccer and volleyball.¹³⁸

Eric took pride in his athletic ability and wrote about it in glowing terms:

In sports, I have been known to play soccer, baseball, football, and even mountain biking. In the sport of soccer, I have played as an offensive and defensive player ... I have proven myself to be a superb player in both positions. As for baseball, I was an excellent outfielder and excellent second baseman.¹³⁹

Dylan was less athletic than Eric, but he did enjoy sports. He played briefly on one of the soccer teams with Eric.¹⁴⁰ Besides their involvement with traditional sports, Eric and Dylan, along with their buddy Chris M., belonged to a paint-ball team called

"The Fighting Amish."¹⁴¹

Eric and Dylan joined their friends in a number of fantasy games. There was a group of twelve boys involved in a fantasy baseball league, and Dylan was highly active in this group. A boy named Chad ran the league; Eric's and Dylan's friend Timothy was also part of the league. According to Timothy, he and Dylan talked daily. In fact, they spoke on the telephone two days before the attack. Besides Chad and Timothy, the other boys were Adam, Cliff, Ben, Dan P., Jason S., Jason F., Justin, Chris H., and Dan H.¹⁴²

The same Chad who ran the fantasy baseball league also assisted Eric and Dylan with their interest in fireworks. Chad drove to Wyoming with Nate to get fireworks for Dylan.¹⁴³

A girl who knew Eric and Dylan from a local mall said that they played something called Live Action Role Play.¹⁴⁴ Another girl said that she had played Dungeons and Dragons with Eric several times.¹⁴⁵ Eric and Dylan were highly involved with video games; they not only played with each other, but with various friends from school, including David, Jeffrey, Greg, and Dustin G.¹⁴⁶

Eric and Dylan frequently went bowling on Friday nights with a regular group of friends, including Robyn, Eric (another Eric besides Eric Harris), Chris M., Kristi, Zach, Monica, Jennifer L., Charles, and perhaps others.¹⁴⁷ Another peer reported that he and Dylan used to belong to the same church youth group, and Dylan once noted in his journal that a church activity had been fun.¹⁴⁸ On a different note, Eric and Dylan had friends with whom they went shooting. These friends included Mark Manes and Phil Duran, the only two people to go to jail in the wake of Columbine (they had bought some of the guns used in the attack), and a girl named Jesse.¹⁴⁹ Other friends included Patrick, Kristen, Ryan, Nathan, and Jordana.¹⁵⁰ Eric and Dylan were both present at a friend's birthday party in August, 1998.¹⁵¹ A boy named Tad said that Eric and Dylan were two of his best friends.¹⁵²

SUMMARY

Considering all the activities Eric and Dylan were involved in with their friends, including soccer, paint-ball, bowling, Dungeons and Dragons, fantasy baseball, video games, making movies, smoking pot, drinking, raising a ruckus at the pizza shop, and more, it is clear that these were not two isolated boys. They had jobs, they helped out at school, and they had multiple peer groups that included numerous boys and girls. The idea that they were lost and alone simply isn't true. This, however, simply makes the attack harder to comprehend.

The Harassment of Eric and Dylan

Perhaps the most pervasive view of the incident at Columbine is that two victimized students retaliated against their tormentors. How victimized were they? Though it is impossible to answer that question definitively, let's review the JCSO documents for evidence.

Several sources stated that Eric was picked on more than Dylan. Dylan's parents reported to law enforcement officials that Dylan told them that though Eric was picked on, he was not. Dylan attributed his lack of harassment to the fact that he was six feet and four inches tall.¹⁵³ This was supported by a boy named Chris, one of Eric and Dylan's closest friends, who said that Eric was picked on more than Dylan.¹⁵⁴

One student stated when Eric and Dylan were juniors, there had been a group of jocks who were seniors who teased them; because this group graduated, however, Eric and Dylan were teased a lot less in their senior year. Another peer also stated that Eric and Dylan had been teased more in their junior year than in their senior year.¹⁵⁵

So how bad was the harassment of Eric and Dylan? They were teased about their clothes, particularly when they wore trench coats on hot days.¹⁵⁶ One student who reported this stated that the teasing about the trench coats was mild. There was a report that Dylan was teased in gym because he was not good at sports. There were also reports that because of his height he was sometimes called "Stretch" or "Jolly Green Giant," though it's not clear if the names were derogatory or playful.¹⁵⁷

Eric was also teased in gym, reportedly for not being good at sports. One student reported that he had teased Eric relentlessly; this individual, however, had graduated the year before the attack.¹⁵⁸ Eric was also teased because he supposedly had a big head on a thin body; this student, however, had left school the previous year.¹⁵⁹ He also noted that he teased many people, not just Eric. Another student said that Eric was occasionally harassed by jocks.¹⁶⁰ Someone else said that Eric was teased, but not as much as other students.¹⁶¹

There was one report about food being thrown at Eric, but this witness seemed to think Eric was part of the Trench Coat Mafia (TCM); he may have confused what was done to the TCM with how Eric was treated.¹⁶² One student said that Eric was occasionally harassed by jocks.¹⁶³ There was also a report that teachers did not intervene when Eric and Dylan were harassed in class.¹⁶⁴ Given Eric and Dylan's ability to alienate people in class, especially Dylan's disruptive and inappropriate behavior (discussed below), it is possible that some of this "harassment" was a normal response to their weird, provocative, and annoying behavior.

The one detailed report of Eric being victimized comes from a student who was in gym class with him in the first semester of senior year. The student testimony stated: "We were playing 'Biff' (like dodge ball, but every man for himself). Eric won the first game, but the second game some jocks ganged up on him and were hitting him in the face with balls. Then after gym they were pushing him into lockers."¹⁶⁵ This was the only specific incident of physical harassment that I found among the student testimonies.

Another student from the same gym class reported not witnessing any harassment of Eric in gym.¹⁶⁶ This suggests that despite the one incident just noted, there was no ongoing harassment of Eric in that class.

What about the evidence from Eric's journal and other writings? Though he mentioned being teased in two journal entries,¹⁶⁷ he never wrote about being physically harassed or threatened. To digress for a moment, the two times that Eric complained about being picked on are so psychologically interesting that they deserve a comment. In the first entry, he complained that, "Everyone is always making fun of me because of how I look."¹⁶⁸ Eric went on to write, "Then again, I have always hated how I looked, I make fun of people who look like me, sometimes without even thinking sometimes just because I want to rip on myself."¹⁶⁹ Having just complained of being teased about his looks, Eric acknowledged that he also made fun of people who looked like him. In other words, he admitted to engaging in the very behavior that he was complaining about.

A similar pattern occurs in the next entry. Eric again complained about the kids who picked on him, but also wrote, "Then again it's human nature to do what you did."¹⁷⁰ He seems to almost be exonerating his peers for simply acting as humans do. Both times he wrote about being picked on, Eric appears to withdraw or counteract his own complaint by stating he has engaged in the same behavior or that it is human nature to engage in such behavior.

There is no question that Eric and Dylan were teased, but the frequency and severity of the reported harassment is not at all clear. Many students reported not witnessing any harassment of Eric or Dylan. For example, a girl named Lisa said that she never saw either one being picked on.¹⁷¹ Neither did Mandy,¹⁷² neither did Steve.¹⁷³ Sarah commented that she never saw them being teased, adding that people tended to just leave them alone because they were different.¹⁷⁴ Keith said that he never saw Dylan being harassed.¹⁷⁵ Deborah specifically noted that there were no problems between Dylan and the jocks in class.¹⁷⁶ Brian stated that Dylan was not picked on by jocks.¹⁷⁷ Sara M., one of Eric's good friends, said that he was not harassed.¹⁷⁸ Another girl, Melissa, commented that Eric was not harassed, and added that he had many friends.¹⁷⁹ Robyn, the girl who invited Dylan to the prom, who spent a great deal of time with him, who called him three times a week just to talk, said that Dylan never talked about being abused by anybody.¹⁸⁰

What does this evidence reveal? Eric and Dylan were teased about a number of things, but given the number of people who reported not witnessing any mistreatment, the teasing does not appear to have been as pervasive as has often been reported. There were students who described the teasing as mild, noting that other kids were picked on more than Eric and Dylan. There are multiple sources that indicated the teasing had been worse the previous year. Also, only one incident of physical harassment toward Eric was identified, with no incidents of physical harassment of Dylan having been reported.

The question that has received comparatively little attention is: how much of the teasing Eric and Dylan received was in response to their own alienating behavior and mistreatment of peers and teachers?

Creating Their Own Social Environment

How much did Eric and Dylan alienate their peers? Reporters were told, “Their peers thought them weird,” and “Harris and Klebold had a way of pushing other kids away from them . . . It was kind of them pushing themselves away.”¹⁸¹ This was supported by another classmate who had the impression that “Eric and Dylan seemed to relish their roles as outsiders . . . ‘The impression I always got from them was they kind of wanted to be outcasts . . . It wasn’t that they were labeled that way. It’s what they chose to be.’”¹⁸²

ERIC AND DYLAN’S HARASSING BEHAVIOR

Eric and Dylan had a history of harassing other students. As far back as eighth grade, the two boys (along with others), sent a girl a threatening letter.¹⁸³ In ninth grade a girl went on a date with Eric, but declined further dates. Eric’s reaction was to fake a suicide in front of her, pretending to have bashed his head in with a rock, and covering himself with fake blood.¹⁸⁴ Another girl who dated Eric and then broke up with him said that after the break-up she received threatening emails.¹⁸⁵ It takes no stretch of the imagination to think that the girls who were thus victimized talked to their friends about these incidents, and Eric’s reputation likely became darker with each episode.

In fact, one girl Eric was interested in reportedly was afraid of him.¹⁸⁶ Another refused to return his calls, commenting that he seemed a little “evil.”¹⁸⁷ Another girl went out with him briefly, but then stopped returning his calls because he was “weird.”¹⁸⁸ Thus, Eric’s behavior was responsible for numerous episodes of rejection.

Multiple students reported that Eric and Dylan picked on people and started fights. Keith said that Eric and Dylan both picked on people, and that Dylan almost got into a physical fight with him.¹⁸⁹ A boy named Seth said that Dylan picked a fight with a jock.¹⁹⁰ In their junior year, Eric and Dylan yelled at jocks.¹⁹¹ An athlete had problems with Eric and Dylan, and Eric wanted to fight him.¹⁹² Another student said that Eric picked a fight with him the year before the attack.¹⁹³

Though it is tempting to assume that any hostility from Eric toward jocks was simply retaliation, this is not necessarily true. Eric had towering rage and contempt toward people in general. The image of big strong jocks picking on little nerdy outcasts is not always accurate. Not all athletes are huge, and not all “outcasts” are little weaklings. Eric had many friends who were well over six-foot tall, and some of them were dangerous kids who carried weapons. The kids in trench coats could be quite intimidating, even to students who were athletes. In fact, there are accounts of jocks being victimized by the Trench Coat Mafia.¹⁹⁴

One classmate said that Eric often started fights and then expected his buddy Chris, who was bigger and stronger, to step in and back him up. Chris said that during senior year Eric had become more aggressive, and was picking more fights. Chris was not happy about Eric’s trying to use him to back him up or

bail him out of trouble that he had started himself.¹⁹⁵ One boy was so harassed and threatened by Dylan that the boy’s parents had to get the administration to intervene.¹⁹⁶ In his book, Ralph Larkin interviewed a girl who appears to be this boy’s sister (Larkin referred to her only by initials). She reported that Eric and Dylan “would follow my brother around and threaten they were going to kill him.”¹⁹⁷ The harassment lasted for one to two months:

My brother said that they’d be outside of a good majority of his classes; they’d follow him to the next one. He said it seemed like they were always there, and that he didn’t want to go to school because he was outright scared of them, and he was in tears when he told my mom that he didn’t want to go to school because of these kids.¹⁹⁸

(This one example shows that Eric and Dylan engaged in an ongoing pattern of bullying behavior. Ironically, none of the interviews in the JCSO documents provides similar evidence that Eric or Dylan were victims of such a pattern of intimidating and threatening behavior. This does not mean that they were not victims of bullying, but it does show the difficulty in identifying reliable documentation that they were.)

There is also a report of how they made fun of another classmate, someone who apparently had been a friend of theirs.¹⁹⁹ Dylan’s journal contains passages about how he struggled not to ridicule and make fun of people at school.²⁰⁰ He also wrote in Eric’s yearbook about how much fun they had picking on “fags.”²⁰¹ Eric and Dylan clearly harassed other students.

DISTURBING BEHAVIOR IN CLASS

In class, Eric and Dylan reportedly “made fun of teachers and students behind their backs and even to their faces, especially those who were computer illiterate. They rolled their eyes at classmates’ stupid questions.”²⁰² In bowling class, they bowled in strange ways, as if shotputting or pitching the balls; this resulted in peers teasing them for their odd behavior.²⁰³ In psychology class, when studying dream interpretation, Eric and Dylan told the class the dreams they had about shooting and killing people.²⁰⁴ One girl commented on the strange things Eric said, such as his talk about survival of the fittest, and that if you are not fit you deserve to die.²⁰⁵ One student recalled that Dylan’s paper on Charles Manson was very “weird.”²⁰⁶

In their video classes, Eric and Dylan showed a film involving smashing a bicycle with a sledgehammer.²⁰⁷ Even more disturbing was their film called “Hitmen for Hire” about students hiring people to kill the kids they didn’t like; the class was not amused.²⁰⁸ One student said that Eric and Dylan showed a bizarre video (this may have been the “hitmen” video) in class that the teacher and students found alarming; the teacher was said to be very angry regarding their project.²⁰⁹

According to a teacher, Eric’s behavior in gym class was notable for his making fun of freshmen.²¹⁰ Dylan’s behavior was even more problematic. Dylan not only cheated in gym, but during co-ed flag-football games, he repeatedly got rough

with girls and tackled them. When one girl told him to knock it off, he became angry and bitter, and began calling her a “bitch” and harassing her to the point that her boyfriend threatened to beat him up.²¹¹

Dylan’s classroom behavior was poor in many ways. He frequently slept in class, came late, and/or sneaked out and left early.²¹² Even worse, he was disrespectful and insulting to his teachers, was disruptive and often asked to leave, slammed the door on his way out, threw things, couldn’t get along with others, and swore openly.²¹³ His behavior was so intimidating that one teacher reported being afraid of him.²¹⁴ One of the school administrators described Dylan as a very angry kid, commenting that Dylan even cursed at him.²¹⁵

ERIC’S TEMPER

According to a classmate, “Eric had a short fuse . . . he got mad easier than most people.”²¹⁶ Even at work, Eric was noted to get upset about things and to lose his temper easily when talking to customers on the telephone.²¹⁷ This tendency showed itself in his personal life, as well. Once when he was interested in a girl, he called her home; when her mother told him that her daughter wasn’t home, Eric shocked her with his angry response.²¹⁸

Eric did not like to be crossed, and once he felt crossed by someone, he did not easily get over it. This tendency to hold grudges was noted by one of Eric’s employers, as well as by Brooks’s mother, who stated, “Eric held grudges and he never let them go.”²¹⁹ Eric, though friends with Brooks, at one point became homicidally angry towards him. A similar situation occurred with another friend of Eric’s, named Nick. Despite their former friendship, after they had a falling out, Eric vandalized both Brooks’s and Nick’s homes.²²⁰ Eric also pushed other friends away. A classmate named Ryan reported that Eric liked him in ninth grade, but not in tenth. Ryan said of Eric, “He just sort of changed . . . He wouldn’t say why. He would just sort of give you this look like he could kill you.”²²¹ Eric also had a falling out with Zach, who had been one of his best friends. Apparently Zach thought Eric’s pranks were getting out of hand, and this was enough to alienate Eric. Zach’s mother said of Eric, “You had to follow him or get away from him.”²²²

Eric was well aware of his problems with anger. When he filled out an intake form for the Diversion program (designed to keep young offenders out of the legal system) on March 25, 1998, he reported having problems with anger. His explanation was: “short temper, often get angry at almost anything I don’t like.” One or both of his parents also filled out a form and indicated that Eric was having problems with anger. The parental comment stated, “Eric seems to suppress his anger, then ‘blow up’ and hit something or verbally lash out. He hasn’t done this at home but has done it at school and work.” A page of notes from the Diversion program documented that Eric reportedly got so angry that he punched walls approximately four times a month.²²³

In a school assignment where he had to list twenty-five

things that made him different, Eric included “my anger management problems” as something that differentiated him from other people.²²⁴ In another assignment, Eric compared himself to Zeus: “Zeus and I also get angry easily and punish people in unusual ways.”²²⁵ As noted above, Eric became increasingly pugnacious toward the end of senior year, picking fights with other people.²²⁶ Eric even snapped in anger at Dylan when Dylan “screwed up.”²²⁷

Even a casual encounter with Eric could prove explosive. Two different students reported that accidental bumps in the hallway with Eric led to anger, pushing, and even a threat that the student should “watch his back.”²²⁸ One of Eric’s favorite bands was KMFDM and he had a cap with their logo on it. When a girl tried to joke with him and asked “what station is that?”, Eric became highly agitated and uttered a veiled threat, saying “you just wait and see.”²²⁹ One student commented that some people simply didn’t dare talk to Eric or Dylan because you never knew what kind of response you would get.²³⁰

A number of people commented on Eric’s ability to give you a look “like he could kill you.” One boy said that the way Eric stared at him was intimidating. Eric was said to have an “evil” stare. A girl who turned Eric down for a date said that he gave her a “malevolent” stare when they crossed paths on the morning of the attack.²³¹ In addition, Eric struck some people as usually being angry or in a bad mood. One said that Eric appeared to always be angry.²³² Another said that Eric was “moody.”²³³ Someone else said that Eric held grudges.²³⁴

One of the most disturbing aspects of Eric was the intensity of his wrath, not toward his enemies, but toward his friends. Harassment by jocks wasn’t necessary for Eric to become homicidal. Just ask Brooks Brown.

Brooks regularly gave Eric a ride to school. Brooks, however, was not always punctual, which infuriated Eric. The situation came to a head one day and Eric flew into a rage. This resulted in the end of the friendship, but it didn’t stop there. Eric threw a snowball or piece of ice that cracked a window in Brooks’s car. The parents got involved. Brooks told Mr. Harris that Eric had liquor stashed in his room. Eric was beyond furious. On his website, he wrote:

I will rig up explosives all over a town and detonate each one of them at will after I mow down a whole fucking area of you snotty ass rich mother fucking high strung godlike attitude having worthless pieces of shit whores. I don’t care if I live or die in the shootout, all I want to do is kill and injure as many of you pricks as I can, especially a few people. Like Brooks Brown.²³⁵

If this is how Eric responded to conflict with his friends, he had no need of enemies to spark his homicidal wrath.

DYLAN’S TEMPER

Dylan had a problem with anger that was evident long before the attack. In fact, “Klebold was widely seen as volatile.”²³⁶ Even his friend, Brooks said, “Dylan would just lose it.”²³⁷ His anger

showed itself while bowling, at the pizza shop, and at school.

A classmate said of Dylan: "He did have a lot of anger, but he hid it most of the time. One time in bowling class, he got so pissed he slammed his fist down on the ball return. It freaked me out."²³⁸ Another girl said that Dylan scared her by the way he looked at her.²³⁹ Michelle, who worked with Dylan at the pizza shop, described him as someone who was often rude and was difficult to get along with. She once talked to Dylan about an infraction he had committed at work, and in response he hit her.²⁴⁰ Another colleague from the pizza shop reported that Dylan would get angry.²⁴¹

As noted above, a female classmate said that Dylan's behavior was highly problematic in gym class:

She said Klebold had a habit of shoving girls to the ground, even tackling them, during flag-football games. Finally, she yelled at him to knock it off, and he turned on her. "He was like a loner in that class," she said. "Nobody liked him. And he hated me, because I yelled at him. And then he started bothering me, calling me a bitch and basically yelling at me and stuff."²⁴²

Mr. and Mrs. Klebold recognized this side of Dylan. They described him as often being angry, sullen, disrespectful, and intolerant of others.²⁴³

Some students perceived Dylan as being chronically angry and irritable. One said that he always had "that grumpy stare on his face."²⁴⁴ Another described him as always having a "hateful look" or a "sneer" on his face.²⁴⁵ Someone else said that Dylan was "mean and sarcastic."²⁴⁶

ALIENATING THEIR PEERS

Numerous students commented on Eric and Dylan's preoccupation with Nazi ideology. One police interview report said that Eric "admired" Hitler, two others said that Eric and Dylan "idolized" Hitler, and yet another said that they "worshipped" Hitler.²⁴⁷ Eric and Dylan not only talked about Hitler, but reportedly sported swastikas, though some reports have denied this. According to students, however, Dylan painted a swastika on his face during Spirit Week, and both boys had swastika patches on their coats and/or backpacks.²⁴⁸ The boys talked about their Nazi beliefs, told racist jokes, made frequent racial remarks, and talked about wanting to kill blacks and Jews.²⁴⁹ Students also reported that in bowling class, when Eric and Dylan did well, they gave Nazi salutes and said "Sieg Heil" or "Heil Hitler;" Eric was teased by his peers about this behavior.²⁵⁰ One of Eric and Dylan's best friends commented that they started acting like skinheads or people following Hitler.²⁵¹

In addition to the swastika patches, both boys reportedly had patches that said "serial killer."²⁵² They also wore Soviet insignia. When asked why he wore this, Eric said it was to get a reaction.²⁵³ On the day of the attack, Dylan wore a Soviet insignia; the autopsy report noted a red star medallion with a hammer and sickle on one of his shoes.²⁵⁴ Finally, it was reported that Eric showed up at a Halloween party as the Unabomber.²⁵⁵ It

seems they went out of their way to be provocative.

Multiple students commented about Eric's obsession with guns and bombs. One said that Eric's life revolved around guns – that it was all he ever talked about.²⁵⁶ Another said that he deliberately avoided Eric and Dylan because of their frequent talk about bombs and shooting people.²⁵⁷ Yet another friend said he stopped associating with Eric and Dylan as their interests became "darker."²⁵⁸ A student who used to be friends with them said that the friendship diminished as Eric and Dylan changed.²⁵⁹

At least eight students referred to Eric and/or Dylan as "weird."²⁶⁰ Others called one or both of them "rude," "annoying," "strange," "paranoid," "messed up," and "unstable."²⁶¹ A co-worker from the pizza shop said that Eric was a nice guy who was angry with life.²⁶² A friend of Eric's said that Eric could be nice, but when playing video games he was a "sadistic prick."²⁶³ Another student said Eric was "psycho."²⁶⁴ Someone else said that Eric "lost touch with reality."²⁶⁵

ILLEGAL/ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR

The most serious crimes that Eric and Dylan committed were related to, and culminated in, the attack on the school. These included the illegal possession of firearms and explosives, sawing the barrels off of guns (a felony), and of course, homicide. These were not the only criminal acts they committed, however. Eric and Dylan engaged in a variety of illegal behaviors, though they were only arrested once.

Their one arrest occurred on January 30, 1998, after they broke the window of an electrician's van and stole electrical equipment. They were caught and confessed. This was not their only antisocial behavior, however. Eric and Dylan (and sometimes Zach) went on nocturnal "Rebel Missions" in which they committed vandalism and acts of mischief. They set off fireworks and small explosives. They stole street signs. They targeted the houses of people that Eric didn't like. They set off firecrackers on people's lawns, put glue in the locks of the house, left eggs to rot, and put toilet paper in trees. They also "messed" with people's telephone lines.²⁶⁶ Because some students at school knew about these activities,²⁶⁷ it is possible that many students knew. This could have contributed significantly to people's dislike of Eric and Dylan.

Eric and Dylan made their presence in the community known in other ways. A security officer at a local shopping center had an encounter with a young man named Eric Harris and two of his friends, all wearing long, black coats; what the boys did to come to the attention of security is not known.²⁶⁸ Elsewhere in town, a security officer witnessed Eric and Dylan spray painting graffiti on his brother's pawnshop. The graffiti said "Death to Pigs" and "Nazis Rule."²⁶⁹ The officer said that one of them had a gun, and they got away in a black BMW, which is the kind of car Dylan drove. Eric loved to set fires and did so frequently behind the pizza shop where he worked.²⁷⁰ On at least one occasion, the fire got out of control and the fire department had to put it out.²⁷¹

Eric, Dylan, and Zach also got in trouble at school in their junior year. They reportedly wanted to put nasty or threatening notes in the lockers of other students, so they hacked into the school's computer system to find out the locker combinations they wanted. They were caught and suspended. Dylan was also suspended for defacing the locker of a student that he didn't like.²⁷² Eric and Dylan stole computer equipment from the school.²⁷³ A former Columbine student told law enforcement that Eric had stolen his or her "discman player."²⁷⁴

There is evidence that Eric committed credit card fraud, but the details are unknown. In one of the videos he made with Dylan, one of them mentions credit card fraud and Eric reportedly raised his hand, apparently admitting that he was guilty of it.²⁷⁵ Zach appears to have been the mastermind of the credit card fraud. The police confiscated his computer and found many credit card numbers on it. Among these was one belonging to a teacher at Columbine; there was also an apology to the teacher for having committed fraud with his credit card.²⁷⁶

The boys broke numerous laws regarding guns and explosives. They used friends who were over eighteen years old to buy guns for them. Not only was this illegal, but two of the friends they manipulated ended up going to jail after the attack. Once they had the guns, Eric and Dylan sawed off the barrels and stocks, which is a felony. They not only built and tested bombs, another illegal activity, but many people knew of their activities with explosives.²⁷⁷

Considering that between the two of them, Eric and Dylan spoke openly about Hitler, gave Nazi salutes, made racist remarks, talked about killing blacks and Jews, made a movie about killing students, were disrespectful to teachers and insulting to peers, shared their dreams of shooting and killing people, disrupted class, cursed at teachers, had intimidating tempers, harassed and threatened other students, cheated in gym, made fun of other students, called people "fags," tackled girls, faked a suicide to get back at a girl, hit a woman at work, vandalized the homes of former friends, committed theft and burglary, bought firearms illegally and went shooting with them, and built and detonated bombs – is it any wonder that they were not accepted in the mainstream of peer culture?

SUMMARY

To summarize this article, several points can be made. First, reports cannot be taken at face value or assumed to be accurate. In investigating Columbine, it is essential to look for inconsistencies and contradictory information. Much of what has appeared in the media regarding Eric and Dylan is simply not reliable information. The first section of the article illustrated this point with examples of erroneous reports from students who did not actually know Eric and Dylan.

The second section made several points: the attack was not targeted toward particular individuals or groups, Eric had many reasons besides retaliation for wanting to kill people, Eric and

Dylan had numerous friends and acquaintances of both sexes and were involved in a variety of activities with their peers, Eric and Dylan were not harassed to the extent that is often stated, and their own behavior gave people reasons to avoid or dislike them.

The reality of Columbine was complex. Eric and Dylan had many friends and participated in numerous activities. Eric and Dylan were feared or disliked by many peers. They teased and harassed students, and they were teased and harassed by students. In addition, an awareness of the extent of Eric and Dylan's problematic behavior is essential to understanding their social interactions at school and how their peers viewed them. Finally, recognizing the history and variety of their misbehavior helps to put the attack in context. Eric and Dylan were not two innocent, well-behaved young men who were driven to violence by teasing. They were seriously disturbed individuals.

NOTES

The notes beginning with "JC" are from the 27,000 pages of documents compiled by the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office (JCSO), the legal authority in charge of the Columbine investigation. Most of these pages are available online or from JCSO. Eric's and Dylan's journals were handwritten; the quotations from them are my transcription. Autopsy reports and Diversion Documents can be found at www.dylanklebold.com, or directions on obtaining them can be found at the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office website: www.co.jefferson.co.us/sheriff/.

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