Targeted Violence:
Pre-Attack Behaviors and Indicators

David L. Young
Categories of Violence

- **Affective**
  - Motivated by anger or fear (indicated by facial expression and high emotion),
  - Reactive or impulsive,
  - Spontaneous passion.
    - Example: A protective response to an unprovoked attack.

- **Predatory**
  - Premeditated or planned in advance,
  - Not precipitated by threat or spontaneous passion (expressionless),
    - Example: School or workplace attack.
  
  (Meloy, 2006)

Not mutually exclusive.
Predatory Violence

- Three Required Elements

1. The perpetrator intends well-beforehand to act violently,
2. The violence is not motivated by spontaneous passion,
3. The violence results in injury, death, or damage.

- In order to prevent an act of intended violence, the potentially aggressive individual must first be identified.

(Calhoun & Weston, 2003)
2 Types of Predatory Violence

- **Targeted**
  - Intended violence directed at an individual or location with symbolic significance.
  - Examples: domestic partners, students, colleagues, public figures, school, courthouse, abortion clinic

- **Opportunistic**
  - Intended violence directed at random individuals because of their location at the time of the attack or their attachment to the selected target location.
  - Examples: students at school, colleagues at work, abortion clinic patients or providers.

(Calhoun & Weston, 2003)
Leakage
Red Lake High School
Red Lake, Minnesota
March 21, 2005

Jeffrey Wiese:
School Video Project
Sølitudé

My Stats

Name: Weisse
Age: 16
Gender: Male
Marital Status: Single, not looking
Location: endless scrutiny, Minnesota, United States
Occupation: Doormat

There is more about me below...

MSN Personals

Send me e-mail
Invite me to install Messenger

My MD Category Interests

Military
High Schools
Death & Dying

A Little About Me

16 years of accumulated rage suppressed by nothing more than brief glimpses of hope, which have all but faded to black. I can feel the urges within slipping through the cracks, the leash I can no longer hold...

Favorite Things

moments where control becomes completely unattainable...
times when maddened psycho paths briefly open the gates to hell, and let chaos flood through...
those few individuals who care enough to reclaim their place...

Hobbies and Interests

Planning
Waiting
Hating

Favorite Quote

"We are little flames, poorly sheltered by frail walls against the storm of dissolution and madness, in which we flicker and sometimes almost go out." - Wehrmacht Private Paul Baumer, All Quiet on the Western Front

My Homepage

Take a look at my personal Web site.

last updated: 3/16/2005
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Image from Wiese’s postings on www.nazi.org as “todesengel”
Threat Identification

Identification is one of the most significant challenges.

A two-fold process: recognition of concerning behaviors and reporting to law enforcement.
Common Motives of Perpetrators of Extreme Violence

- Extreme anger
- Perception of being persecuted
- Paranoid ideation
- Depressed mood
- Antisocial and narcissistic traits
- Real or perceived loss often related to employment or relationship

Common Motives (continued)

• Pre-emptive strike
• Magnify and incubate insults
• Externalization of blame

Pre-Attack Behaviors

Some of these behaviors may include:

• Development of a personal grievance
• Contextually inappropriate and recent acquisition of multiple weapons
• Contextually inappropriate and recent escalation in target practice and weapons training
• Contextually inappropriate and recent interest in explosives and IEDs
• Drug and/or alcohol abuse
Pre-Attack Behaviors (Continued)

Additional behaviors may include:

- Intense interest or fascination with previous active shootings or mass attacks
- Engagement with violent media, i.e. video games, movies, music, internet
- Prior to an attack, others were concerned by the attacker’s behaviors
  - But did not recognize significance
  - Or failed to report to authorities

Very few attackers issue direct threats against the targeted person or institution prior to the violent act.
Risk Enhancers

- Violence History
- Physical and Mental Health
- Weapons Access
- Problematic Behaviors
- Social and Environmental Behaviors
- Warning Behaviors
- Signs of Imminence
- Triggers and Stressors
Other Risk Enhancers

- Personality conflicts
- Terminations
- Weapons possession – in violation of policy
- Drug/Alcohol possession
- Marital problems/separation/divorce
- Child custody dispute
- Legal problems
- Emotional
Warning Signs

- Behaviors a teacher, student, co-worker, customer, or other person may notice in an individual triggering concern there might be a developing problem

- Also known as Leakage or pre-incident indicators

- Key to Early Warning recognition

- More warning signs correlates with an elevated level of risk. (Bardick, 2007)
Warning Signs

- **Behavioral/Physical Clues**
  - Physical altercation/frequent fighting
  - Inappropriate weapons possession or use
  - Drawings and other creative outlets with persistent or intense violent themes
  - Bullying or victim of bullying
  - Possession of violent literature and information pertaining to known or suspected hate groups
  - Inappropriate displays of emotion, particularly anger, depression, or rage
  - Isolated and withdrawn
  - Noticeable changes in behavior including hygiene or dress

  (Mohandie, 2002)
Warning Signs

- Verbal Behavior
  - Direct or indirect threats
  - Verbalizing a violent plan
  - Recurrent suicide threats or statements
  - Expressing a wish to kill, a wish to be killed, and a wish to die
  - Threatens or brags about bringing a weapon to work/school
  - Threatening/harassing phone calls or e-mails
  - Hopeless statements, depression
  - Excessive profanity (contextually inappropriate)
  - Challenging or intimidating statements
  - Name-calling or abusive language

(Mohandie, 2002)
Emotional Leakage
(Inadvertent Disclosure)
I kill for satisfaction
I kill him and her
I don't care
their blood will become wine
flesh into delightful meat
like the taste of a dog on a street.

Blood will pour from their tormented bodies
cries of punishment not foolishness.
Their torso will break.
They will scream for mercy.
AND they will die!!!

This is no lie.
For the scream and cry.
Inappropriate Contacts and Communications “IC+Cs”

- Threats
  - Not necessarily specific or direct – could be veiled or conditional

- Correspondences
  - Involving death, suicide, or homicide
  - Extreme/obsessive admiration
  - Indicators that research and planning has been done
  - References to previous attackers or victims
  - Belief that there is direct communication, a relationship, debts owed
  - Belief in a shared destiny or history
  - Can be in any form, i.e. telephone, mail, email, voicemail, text, SMS, morse code, etc.

(California Highway Patrol, Special Investigations Unit in Calhoun & Weston, 2003)
Warning Signs

- **Bizarre Thoughts**
  - **Delusion:**
    - Belief in events not typically viewed as possible because of evidence to the contrary
  - **Persecutory delusions with self as victim:**
    - Sufferer is willing to do things to protect from real or imagined persecution
      - Harm to reputation, mistreatment, being spied upon, plotted against
      - Severe form of paranoia
  - **Paranoid:**
    - Believing others are conspiring to do the sufferer harm
  - **Command (auditory) hallucinations:**
    - hearing voices (there is danger when the voices command violence)
      - (Mohandie, 2002)
Warning Signs

- **Obsessions/Fixation**
  - Grudges & deep resentments:
    - Often present in extreme violence scenarios
  - Romantic obsessions:
    - Stalking
    - Love may turn to hate, shame, rage, and violence toward the love object
  - May be triggered by *perceived* injustices, humiliations, disrespect
  - At-risk individual focuses almost solely on how “so-and-so” has done them wrong or ruined their life
  - “Aggression Immersion”
    - Late step in moving from violent thought to action
    - Repetitively listening to songs with violent lyrics; watch movies, or play video games with intensely violent themes

(Mohandie, 2002)
PATHWAY TO INTENDED VIOLENCE

6. ATTACK
5. BREACH
4. PREPARATION
3. RESEARCH & PLANNING
2. IDEATION
1. GRIEVANCE

(CALHOUN AND WESTON, 2003)
Threat Assessment

Definition:
Accurately and defensibly assess the threat posed by the subject of significant and imminent violence

Accomplished by:
Trained threat assessment professionals, teams, and/or units
Threat Assessment
Gathering Information

- Police and Military Records
- School and Work Records
- Medical and Mental Health Records
- Communications and Journals
- Life and Relationships
- Social Media
Assessment Management Cycle

1. Assess Threat
2. Choose Intervention
3. Implement Intervention
4. Monitor and Evaluate

Gallagher
Insurance | Risk Management | Consulting
Higher Education Practice
Risk Inhibitors

- Non-violent Alternatives
- Future oriented
- Healthy Self-esteem
- Coping mechanisms
- Access to resources
- Healthy Environment
- Support system
Profiling

- **Prospective**
  - Templates overlaid upon a population or group in an attempt to predict who within that group might have an elevated potential to commit a specific type of crime.

- **Retrospective**
  - An after-the-fact, case-specific analysis to define the personality and behavioral characteristics of the individual(s) who committed a crime or series of crimes.
    - “Real profiles”
Goal of Assessment is to answer this question: Is there evidence to suggest movement from thought to action?

- Intent, planning, preparation
- Acquisition/practice with firearms (out of character)
- Aggression immersion (late step in movement from thought to action)
- Disregarding warnings to stay away (pre-attack surveillance?)
OR MORE SIMPLY:

“Does the individual **POSE** a threat, not simply whether the individual **MADE** a threat.”

(Borum, et al., 2004a)
Threat Assessment Team

Law Enforcement

Human Resources
Legal
Social Services
Mental Health
Security
Threat Assessment Team

Who Should Not Be On The Team?
- Treating Mental Health Professionals
- Subjects of Threat Assessments
- TAT Members Who Have Been Threatened or Harmed

(Mohandie, 2002)
Threat Assessment Team

- TAT leader should decide when to convene the team and be final arbiter
- Each time the TAT convenes or a team member consults, document:
  - Date
  - Who was present
  - How the meeting was conducted (telephonic or in person)
  - Issues that were the focus of review
  - Sources of information reviewed
  - Level of concern for violence and justification why
  - Recommendations for future action/management strategies
  - Attempts to make appropriate referrals
    - Prosecutor or psychologist
  - Get information to staff

(Mohandie, 2002)
Threat Assessment Team

Team Member Responsibilities - Generally

- Convene when a problem has been identified or on a monthly basis
  - More frequently if the situation dictates
- Triage versus 360 degree assessment
  - Assess the veracity and severity of the threat.
  - Determine appropriate interventions, i.e. interviews, locating the POC, locating and warning target, third-party intermediary, suspension, termination.
- Train employees in the early warning signs of a potential problem and reporting procedures.
- Help to draft violence prevention policies and procedures and arrange for the team's own training and development.
- The threat assessment team database acts as a warehouse of information containing past threats.
  - It prevents fragmentation of knowledge.

(Mohandie, 2002)
Threat Assessment Team

New Referrals

New case referrals should be triaged asap to assess initial level of concern for violence.

The initial assessment should also involve identification of needed resources and ad hoc team members

Case predication:

- Threat or inappropriate communication indicative of violence
- Report of concerning or threatening behavior
- Recognition of warning behavior
Team Member Responsibilities

- **Have mechanisms in place for employees to report info**
  - Publicize method and make it readily available
- **Information Gathering** - The team will gather information regarding potential threats, then assess the individual’s “access, means, capacity, and opportunity” for carrying it out (p. 103).
- **Interviewing** - Conduct interviews of those with connections to the perpetrator and (potential) victims.
- **Assessment** - The team will assess intent; actions taken toward executing the plan of violence.
- **Make decisions/Management** – What should be done now vs. immediate future?
  - Who will manage the suspect? Human resources, LE, security, EAP, mental health provider
- **Monitoring** - The team will then assess the individual’s behaviors as they relate to efforts at risk-reduction or signs of escalation.
Threat Assessment Team

New Florida Law

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act

• Requires every school in Florida to have a threat assessment team with expertise in mental health counseling, academic instruction, law enforcement and school administration to meet monthly to review any potential threats to students and staff at the school

Categorical Approach to Describing Risk

- **Category 1**
  Individual is imminently dangerous to self or others and qualifies for immediate hospitalization or arrest.

- **Category 2**
  Individual evidences high violence potential but does not qualify for hospitalization or arrest.

- **Category 3**
  Insufficient evidence for violence potential, but sufficient evidence for the repetitive and/or intentional infliction of emotional distress upon others.

(Mohandie, 2002)
Categorical Approach to Describing Risk

- **Category 4**
  Insufficient evidence of violence potential, but sufficient evidence for the unintentional infliction of emotional distress upon others.

- **Category 5**
  Insufficient evidence of either violence potential or the intentional infliction of emotional distress.

(Mohandie, 2002)
Threat Management

Definition:
- Deliberate steps taken to minimize or mitigate the threat of violence

Accomplished by:
*Developed by the Threat Management Team (TMT), implemented by many community stakeholders*
Management Options 1

Active

Direct Interview
Third Party Monitor
Watch and Wait
Take No Further Action

Passive
Management Options 2

Active

Confinement

Criminal Enforcement

Civil Actions

Administrative Actions

Passive
Primary Research Sources

2002 – FBI BAU

Examined the pre-attack warning behaviors of attackers who targeted places of employment
Primary Research Sources

2017: FBI BAU

Identifying, Assessing and Managing the Threat of Targeted Attacks

Search Making Prevention a Reality and FBI
Targeted Violence: Pre-Attack Behaviors and Indicators

Special Agent Dave Young
David.Young@ic.fbi.gov
(847) 734-9831
Thank You!