THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE: CONVERGING PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLANATORY MODELS FOR POWER STRUGGLES AND VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

BY STUART W. TWEMLOW, M.D.

This paper demonstrates that several psychoanalytic models taken together converge to collectively explain school violence and power struggles better than each does alone. Using my own experience in doing psychoanalytically informed community intervention, I approach the problem of school violence from a combination of Adlerian, Stollerian, dialectical social systems, and Klein–Bion perspectives. This integrated model is then applied to the Columbine High School massacre in Littleton, Colorado.

Deprived of the affective nourishment to which they were entitled, their only resource is violence. The only path which remains open to them is the destruction of the social order of which they are the victims. Infants without love, they will end as adults full of hate.

—R. A. Spitz (1965)

This paper is a first attempt at the distillation of a lifetime of thinking about the roots of violence. The author would like to thank Salman Akhtar, M.D.; Peter Fonagy, Ph.D.; Glen O. Gabbard, M.D.; Owen Renik, M.D.; Frank C. Sacco, Ph.D.; Renahi Stephen Twemlow; Vamik Volkan, M.D.; and students of the School of Martial and Meditative Arts, Topeka, Kansas.
A student confided in the Zen master Soen Nakagawa during a meditation retreat, "I am very discouraged. What should I do?" Soen replied, "Encourage others."

—As quoted by K. Tanahashi and D. Schneider (1994)

It takes a whole village to raise a child.

—Anonymous African proverb

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

—Edmund Burke

INTRODUCTION

Among Freud’s numerous contributions to an understanding of the human mind, one of the most important was the principle of overdetermination (Freud 1893, 1895). This explanatory concept helped him to fathom the almost overwhelming complexity of the multiple causes of human problems without oversimplifying the process. The goal of this paper is to examine a series of models, and then, extrapolating from Freud’s principle of overdetermination—usually applied to clinical syndromes in individuals—to come to an understanding of power struggles in various settings. Instead of explaining symptoms as arising from several causes not "good and sufficient" in themselves (in Aristotle’s—and Freud’s—sense), I arrive at formulations by applying four psychoanalytic models with different perspectives and assumptions which, when taken together, elucidate power struggles in a more comprehensive manner than does each individually.

Some of the data and ideas for this theoretical exegesis come from an intensive research study of an elementary school that had the highest student suspension rate in its district, and where there had been a sexual assault on a second-grade girl by a group of second-grade boys (Twemlow, Fonyagy et al., in press). Now, four years later, the school’s students demonstrate well-above-average academic achievement, and the school is so quiet that on one occasion when
visited, I thought it was closed for the day because there was so little noise! In short, the primary objective of the research study was to help staff and students deal with their power struggles so that coerciveness was no longer necessary for communication. Our intervention had a remarkable and widespread effect on the school community as a whole.

WHAT IS TRULY PSYCHOANALYTIC ABOUT COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS?

A caveat is in order to make a very fundamental distinction between two potentially disparate views of what is "truly" psychoanalytic about psychoanalytic efforts in the community. Whereas this is not the venue to discuss what is fundamentally psychoanalytic about psychoanalysis, it should be pointed out that for those using psychoanalytic concepts in the community, there are two distinct "camps," sometimes generating more heat than light when discussing their differing points of view. On the one hand, Bracher (1992), for example, from a Lacanian perspective, considered the "true" psychoanalytic approach to communities to be one analogous to the classic stance, in which the analyst remains a passive interpreter of group functioning, attempting to bring the group to an understanding of its problems and to create solutions based on insight that will then make it a working group. According to this viewpoint, any attempts to intervene actively are seen as seductive, distorting, manipulative, or as gratifying group transference phenomenon. The other approach holds that, while transference-based expectations of group participants needs to be monitored and handled, and while such expectations are used to understand the etiology of the problem, the primary intervention is not interpretative, but instead is directed at actively changing how the group functions. I do not see such efforts as seductive or contradictory to any model of psychoanalytic activity, but rather as an integral part of any typical supportive intervention basic to the analytic process. The school intervention described in this paper is one example of such a technique.
Similarly, Gould (1991) divided psychoanalytic organizational consultations into two types, according to whether they are more or less like clinical work with patients. His Type I psychoanalytic approach utilizes technical procedures and methods of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy, such as organizational role analysis and the techniques of the Tavistock Group Relations Training Conference. Type II consultations are guided by psychoanalytic principles, but utilize nonanalytic methods and techniques. The modalities of this type are multiple and varied; they include many types of interventional strategies designed to alter the organization once its situation is psychoanalytically comprehended. Gould called these approaches “sociotechnical.”

**NEW APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY PSYCHOANALYSIS**

Extending Gould’s work, I propose a Type III approach, utilizing the “Tree model” of Volkan (1998) and the “Engineered Conflict model” of Twemlow and Sacco (1996). The Type III approach begins with a psychoanalytic “diagnosis” of the problem, as well as the establishment of a community-initiated, psychoanalytically facilitated dialogue in which needs, wishes, and goals are articulated by leaders and members of the community. Then an intervention is designed to meet the goals and resolve the problem.

Volkan’s “Tree model” provides a potentially integrating framework for these apparently contradictory approaches. Volkan (1999a), in reviewing the results of a community project in Estonia, discussed the analogy of a tree as a useful metaphor when considering how noncoercive dialogue creates useful and ever-increasing options, like the innumerable branches of a healthy, growing tree. The tree’s roots are solidly planted in a model of human change derived from Freud: that the causes and cures of problems reside in those experiencing them, and that the community psychoanalyst’s task is to facilitate insight into these processes with supportive, adaptive alternatives, derived from needs the community analyst helps uncover.
Extending that model, a similar process has been proposed (Twemlow and Sacco 1999) in which diagnosis of the community's problems follows the establishment of dialogue in a background of safety and trust, with input from representatives of warring and decision-making groups and the evolution of a group consensus approach, and constructive conflict engineered by the facilitator. The process to achieve this has been called "engineered conflict" (Twemlow and Sacco 1996). The final step in this model is a psychological "vaccination" campaign, whereby skills are developed in community members to prevent conflict and to develop a habit of collaboration, with development of insight and open dialogue. Thus, ongoing community projects are more likely to continue beyond the termination of the intervention and are themselves the visible outcome measures.

It is at this point that the specific projects of a sociotechnical nature (Type II) have relevance. Such projects need to be nested in psychoanalytic theory, but might make use of nonpsychoanalytic interventions—for example, behavioral modification and psychoeducational skills training. The point Volkan made, with which I strongly agree, is that the individuals of the community are the ones who best know what and where the needs are and can provide the point of entry for most effective assistance.

The psychological goals of these initial dialogues are:

1. To learn to tolerate differences in others and negative emotions without reacting impulsively or angrily (i.e., establishing a point of similarity).

2. To develop a habit of collaboration around issues that are not points of conflict—e.g., in the school project discussed earlier, obtaining play equipment and constructing soccer goals became products of the habit of collaboration.

3. To develop personal relationships and perceptions of each other, so that the people and the process become humanized (i.e., part object relationships become whole object relationships). The frequent negative experi-
ence of frustrated teachers who refer problem children to unresponsive doctors is a theme that creates part object relationships. If not worked through, such common misperceptions can undermine the working relationship between psychoanalyst and teacher. Off-site workshops and meetings in homes help create a less defensive atmosphere.

4. To deal with stereotypical racial, religious, and gender perceptions of each other. Mutual respect for differences must be developed. For example, in our intervention, a Baptist minister's dislike of the term "meditation" was accommodated by referring instead to "relaxation techniques."

5. To develop an agreed-upon common language to communicate ideas. In this instance, the language of coercive power relationships, exemplified by bully-victim-bystander interactions, was mutually adopted.

6. To understand that the process is not a magic bullet and needs long-term, ongoing work.

7. To understand that only a collaborative, rather than competitive, partnership will result in change.

8. To achieve an understanding by all participants that the facilitator must remain neutral in the psychoanalytic sense, i.e., nonjudgmental, warm, and caring.

CREATING A PEACEFUL SCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: A SUMMARY OF INTERVENTION ELEMENTS

The initial impetus for my colleagues and me to become involved in the school project mentioned earlier was a violent power struggle: the attempted rape of a girl student by other students. The school
met the criteria for a violent community (Twemlow and Sacco 1999): a high level of teacher dissatisfaction; a low level of parent involvement and proactive problem-solving; adversarial relationships between school personnel and the parents of problem children; school tolerance of power struggles without an active plan to identify and manage them; high suspension rates and disciplinary referrals; a high number of dropouts in nearby middle and high schools; many student fights; gang recruitment activity; drug and alcohol use in nearby middle and high schools; and low overall academic achievement.

Working from surface to depth, we developed our program after dialogue with teachers, administrators, custodial and secretarial staff, students, and parents. The organizational structure involved maintaining consistent supports, such as regular coordination meetings and consultant availability, with continuity maintained by the psychoanalytically informed project staff, who were aware of the psychological importance of such containment. Bion’s (1967) containment model emphasized the processing of negative as well as positive object relational configurations, in contrast to the “holding environment” of Winnicott (1965), which is more exclusively a positive and encouraging model. In addition, the intervention was molded to characteristics of the school in a way similar to a good therapy’s adaptation to fit the needs of the patient. The method used was based on understanding and addressing the etiology of the problem, rather than on forceful attempts to superimpose a corrective experience—e.g., truancy programs based on improved detection and increased penalties. Table 1 summarizes the main components of the school intervention.1

Having described the methodology and context of this study, I will now focus on psychoanalytic models for the nature of power struggles and how adults’ and children’s behavior and psychology influence such struggles.

1 More detailed descriptions of the program components are available in Twemlow, Fonagy et al. (in press) and in Twemlow, Sacco, and Twemlow (1999).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Name</th>
<th>Program Components</th>
<th>Psychoanalytic Function</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero tolerance for bullying,</td>
<td>Peace flags, posters, stickers, discussions, and a discipline program focused on</td>
<td>Adopting a psychoeducational approach to self-awareness and identification of repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being a victim, or bystanding</td>
<td>identifying and correcting power dynamics</td>
<td>compulsions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gentle Warrior Program</td>
<td>Martial arts-based skills training to replace or supplement physical education classes</td>
<td>Supporting and supplementing adaptive ego functioning; restoring self-esteem and self-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Mentor and Peer Leader Program</td>
<td>Older children assist younger ones in solving power struggles</td>
<td>confidence by strengthening sublimatory defenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruno Program</td>
<td>Adult mentors provide conflict-resolution skills outside the classroom</td>
<td>Establishing a containment function (good and bad self-representations) of the adult</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>mentor creates a “net of safety”</td>
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AN ADLERIAN APPROACH TO RITUALS OF EXCLUSION

Adler’s group theory approach helped to inform my conceptualization of this school’s group process (Ferguson 1984). Adler described a healthy attitude in the group as a sense of oneness and identification with the community, with concern for others and their welfare. When an individual lacks a sense of belonging to the group, he or she becomes an isolated outsider, with attendant psychological sequelae, or instead strives to find a place in the group by proving him- or herself. Adler felt that such striving rarely leads to lasting, peaceful success. The goal of the teachers in our project, then, was to help children know that each had a place and that each belonged to the school community merely by virtue of his or her existence. As a result of such knowledge, a child no longer needs to “prove” him- or herself. Once that realization occurs, children can expend their energies on contributing to the group, rather than on proving individual value or status.

One of the values of the Adlerian model is that it highlights the power of group rituals of exclusion in the production of overt violence. The struggles of those excluded then focus on acceptance in one form or another, usually an acceptance that leads to disruption of the working function of the group as a whole and of its peace and harmony. Adler (1958) noted that “every human being strives for significance, but people always make mistakes if they do not see their whole significance must consist in the contribution to the lives of others” (p. 8).

Using Adler’s concept of identification with the group, my colleagues and I set up our intervention to foster an innate sense of realization of one’s fundamental right to belong to the group. Following on this concept, we adapted ideas from Dreikurs (1957) to provide a succinct typology for the meaning of disruptive behavior in young children, theorizing that the child’s disturbing actions are based on his or her basic aim of achieving a place in the classroom group. The defiant child, from this point of view, believes that such behavior will lead to acceptance by the group. He or she may adopt
one or more of the following pathological behaviors or attitudes to gain group acceptance.

1. **Attention-getting mechanisms.** In our culture, children often have few opportunities to be useful contributors within the family group. Thus, getting attention through socially acceptable methods, like being “cute,” is common. If being cute does not work, more unpleasant methods—e.g., acting out—are often employed, which may lead to considerable humiliation and punishment. DreiKurs (1957) commented that “children prefer being beaten to being ignored” (p. 13). From kindergarten through third grade, children’s relationships with their teachers are still very much in a child–parent mode. Thus, teachers in the younger grades often function as direct parental models, with children not distinguishing academic goals from parental containment and nurturing. It is not unusual for teachers in these grades to comment on the degree to which they see their function as primarily a parenting one.

2. **Power struggles between children and adults.** A struggle between a child and an adult often leads to a stalemate, with the child ultimately “winning” because the adult’s authority is inhibited by superego prohibitions, while the child is not as fettered. Even when the parent is abusive, the child wins an indirect moral victory. In our modern era, the child can further humiliate the parent or teacher by phoning an anonymous child abuse hotline, or by complaining to parents about teachers or vice versa. In these power struggles, the roles of bully, victim, and bystander are interchangeable, frequently fluctuating from moment to moment. My observation has been that as long as the roles are interchangeable, dialogue about reclusion in the group is possible and can proceed. Once the roles become fixed, however, as was likely in the tragic Columbine High School massacre in Littleton, Colorado, serious damage is usually imminent.
3. Fixed revenge or retaliation power dynamics. A fixed revenge-retaliation dynamic occurs when the battle for power reaches extreme degrees. The main goal of such battles is revenge for being hurt. The purpose of the revenge, as Stoller (1974) has pointed out, is to rebel against and retaliate for the painful position in which the child feels he or she has been placed by the parental figure. In children’s dynamics—and sometimes in those of other groups—the hated one occupies a powerful role. Thus, the bully in a school setting maintains a powerful status based on his or her fantasies and those of peers regarding the bully’s capacity to hurt and control. As children mature into adulthood during the latter years of high school, bullies often lose a great deal of their influence with peers, unless the whole group is socially regressed and the role of the bully controls day-to-day living of the group members, as in gang-dominated schools. This can also occur in schools in which the principal behaves in a way that reinforces such a fear-producing, bullying image. I know of one such principal who was proud of a portrait of General Patton hanging in a prominent place behind his desk.

4. Real or imagined inferiority feelings. A victimized child who is passive and beaten down may become so discouraged that he or she gives up the hope of playing a positive role in the group and begins to display defeat and failure, with inferiority serving as a defense against any expectations of him or her. Nonparticipation is often an attempt to preclude more humiliating and embarrassing experiences. Alternatively, a victimized child may retaliate with massive, destructive revenge, as in many of the recent school killings.

These four behaviors and attitudes converge in the core concept of a power struggle within a context of dominant-submissive power dynamics, which I believe underpin all human and most primate relationships (Twemlow 1995a, 1995b).
THE DYNAMICS OF RITUALIZED EXCLUSION AND BULLYING

Human history is, in many respects, the story of ways in which individuals have excluded each other from participation in social activities. Such exclusion and exclusion rituals have a variety of motives (Hoover and Milner 1999), both pathological and motivated by group survival instinct. Such patterns are immortalized in literature, as exemplified by the exclusionary tactics in *The Scarlet Letter* and the painful, bullying experiences of *Tom Brown's School Days*.

The extraordinary impact of bullying on the psychological state of the victim is well documented (Twemlow 1995a, 1995b). A chronically victimized child shows similar symptoms to those of a victim of chronic domestic violence. The mind of such a child, under the influence of hormonal shifts, becomes uncreative, perseverative, and very narrow in focus, resulting in a despairing acceptance of the victimization because creative solutions do not occur to the victim. Thus, submission becomes a way of life.

Traditional definitions of bullying (Olweus 1992) and our definition (Twemlow, Sacco, and Williams 1996) need extension. We have called bullying “the exposure of an individual, over and over again, to negative interactions on the part of one or more dominant persons, who gain in some way from the discomfort of the victims” (p. 297). Such an individualized definition does not sufficiently emphasize two important features of bullying: (1) the nature of gain by the bully; and (2) the role-interdependent natures of the bully, victim, and bystander.

Some examples of bullying which are socially accepted in our culture today are the following:

1. *Hazing*: Hazing rituals on college campuses, which at times have serious or even fatal consequences, reflect the way in which a newcomer is absorbed into a group. In many ways, hazing is designed to symbolically sever the initiate from his or her past life through acts of extreme deprivation or cruelty. An oath of loyalty to the new "family" is often required as part of the ritual. Ul-
timely, the novice assumes the group identity, and, as Ramzy and Bryant (1962) have pointed out, there are further ramifications as the newest members of the group perform acts of cruelty on the next novitiates, so as to cement their apparent conversion to group loyalty as well as to act out their displaced rage.

2. **Excommunication**. Religious rituals whereby those who do not follow the religion’s precepts are excluded from the group are exemplified by formal excommunication. Such rituals have significance for individuals committed to the religion, but may have little effect on individuals of the larger, more diverse society as a whole. In contrast, excommunication in the more isolated Amish community, where religion has great significance, may even prevent individuals from pursuing their livelihoods within the group.

3. **Blackballing**: Blackballing is sometimes a function of unions. Union members who cross a picket line can be blackballed, ostracized, and ignored, if not physically brutalized and harassed. Attempts are often made to prevent strike breakers from obtaining work by denial of union membership, rumor spreading, and negative job references.

*A Personal Experience with Exclusion and Bullying*

While I was in general medical practice in a small coal-mining village, I reported on the incidence of tuberculosis being transmitted to humans from unpasteurized milk. Little did I know that pasteurization would have shut out certain local milk suppliers, who had great influence with the city council. In a brief space of time, local newspapers featured headlines depicting me as a “Svengali,” hypnotizing the community about the value of pasteurization while neglecting the importance of God’s natural, unadulterated milk! My wife was ignored when she went into stores to shop, and my medical practice dropped off; people traveled up to 300 miles for medical care rather than seek treatment with this ostracized scapegoat.
Parenthetically, I would like to mention that the term *ostracize* comes from the Greek *ostraca*, the word for potsherds used in Attica in the third century B.C. The term was used to describe people whom community leaders felt should be banished, just as school communities and larger communities today less formally cast their votes by ignoring bullying, pathological power struggles, and rituals of exclusion. Hoover and Millner (1999) focused correctly, I think, on an aspect of such bullying behavior that was missed in many other studies that reflect the more benign desire to dominate. Many exclusion rituals practiced by children and adults are not based on the goal of preserving the group through exclusion of dangerous, unhealthy individuals who may weaken it, but instead are more sadistic in nature.

To return to my personal experience with bullying, and to view it in a positive light, this exclusion could be seen to stem from the survival instinct of that particular community and its milk suppliers. The solution in this case was actually quite a simple one: I met with the president of the city council and pointed out that I would have to leave the community if the situation did not improve. (That area had had considerable trouble obtaining medical care.) Community members responded with apologies, and an overwhelming number of patients returned, some bringing gifts of vegetables and meats. Acceptance in the group required only that I remind the townspeople of my vital role in the community; but had I assumed the stance of victim and withdrawn from the group, everyone would have suffered. Obviously, there is an interaction between the way in which power struggles are filtered through the biological matrix and the psychological makeup of the individuals involved.

**BULLYING BY STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS**

In observing and studying the ways in which children function in schools, and particularly their power struggles, my colleagues and I have been acutely aware of the similarities between children’s be-
behavior and the functioning of adults. Certainly, as the African proverb notes, it takes a whole village to "raise" a child, but child-rearing can become pathological if that village has unconscious dynamics that encourage exclusion of certain members from the group as a whole.

In a classroom setting, a bullying child is often the one creating a disturbance—for example, firing "spitballs." Here the target victim may be the teacher, who might become very upset and the object of triumphant ridicule by the bully and his or her retinue of bully-bystander disciples. The triumph is based on the teacher’s having lost his or her "cool." Ultimately, the entire class is victimized, since learning time is sacrificed. In our experimental intervention (Twemlow, Sacco, and Twemlow 1999), the discipline plan formed the foundation for the whole class's reflection on its role in the disturbance, and in this sense, the entire class carried some responsibility for the actions of the bully.

It is generally accepted that bullying is much more common among boys than girls, especially physical bullying (Boulton and Underwood 1992; Hazler, Hoover, and Oliver 1991). However, as society moves toward increased acceptance of aggressiveness and assertiveness in women, there is already some evidence that this is changing and may change further. Nonetheless, current research indicates that boys bully more frequently than girls, and even in the elementary school years, such bullying often has sexual overtones.

The biological vulnerability and the developmental position of natural aggressiveness in young children make them particularly susceptible to dynamics in which power is operative. Bullying, up into the middle years of high school, often has considerable social status amongst peers. Thus, there is a developmental, social aspect to the bullying that is maintained by the psychological needs of the bully’s peers. To summarize, the bully gains both social power and personal satisfaction from the combination of an exalted position within the peer bystanding group and personal sadistic/sexual pleasure at the humiliation of the victim. I will next address the forms such humiliation takes.
Physical Bullying

Physical bullying is, in most cases, a form of teasing, hitting, poking, tripping, or slapping contact. Physical damage is usually not great. It is the humiliation of the child in the presence of peers that is the benchmark of the bully. Too much damage to the victim may encourage sympathy for the victim from peers and punishment for the bully. Dunking the head of a child in a toilet, hanging obnoxious signs on the back of clothing, sexual grabbing, and other forms of touching and poking are common physical manifestations of bullying dynamics. Defilement of clothing, school bags, and lockers constitutes less direct physical bullying.

Name Calling and Rumor Mongering

Verbal bullying always occurs in the context of an audience and takes a variety of forms. Teasing is often said to be in fun, but is very rarely enjoyed by the object of the teasing, in spite of the bully's protestation that the teasing is meant in jest. Victims of this form of bullying are often children who are vulnerable because of psychological factors, such as shyness or low self-esteem, or because of physical problems, such as seizure disorders, acne, or cerebral palsy. The put-downs serve to unite the group and to stimulate strong feelings within it. Insulting nicknames are not uncommon: "Elephant Man" for the ugly child, "Dumbo" for the one with big ears, or "Tiny" for the obese child. Occasionally, such a nickname is adopted by the victim as a form of "undoing" or minimizing the damage done. The pressures on group members to be connected with the powerful bully leader increase the dilemma of the victim, since negative reaction to the verbal bullying may lead to further exclusion from the group.

Rumors often exclude children from informed peer groups, such as cliques or "street clubs." Sometimes, this sort of problem reaches epidemic proportions in schools. My colleagues and I consulted in a school with few disciplinary and no academic prob-
lems, but in which the younger children did not want to go to school, resulting in complaints to the principal from their parents. This unhappiness had been created by the formation of cliques that excluded younger children. The older students were consequently engaged in our intervention program as peer leaders and assistant instructors; thus strongly encouraging them to act as mentors for younger children rather than as bullies. Some school administrators are alert to this type of bullying exclusion of certain children from overnight activities, birthday parties, and so on, but usually try unsuccessfully to legislate it away, rather than to understand and deal with the underlying psychodynamic causes.

There is an echolalic form of bullying, i.e., mimicking speech or repeating the victim's last few words, or exaggerating the gait or other physical peculiarities of the victim. In late latency and early adolescence, especially among girls, rumor-spreading is a very common form of verbal bullying, frequently having to do with accusations of promiscuity, as the following vignette illustrates.

**Vignette 1: A Victim of Rumors.**

A sixth-grade girl was shy and quite slow intellectually in comparison to her peers. She had highly upwardly mobile parents, who were extremely ambitious and competitive, and an older sister who excelled in school and was good at sports. Little by little, the girl was sexually humiliated by the circulation of various rumors about her. She expressed the increasing erosion of her self-image in drawings that revealed considerable anger and depression, as well as envy of the peer acceptance of her friends. It was not until a couple of years later that she acted out her rage at the rumors and at her mother's lack of empathy for her plight: One evening, she announced at the dinner table, to the chagrin of her mother, that she was sexually active and "just thought her mother should know." This was said in a deadpan way, as if no further reaction were expected. The mother collapsed.
SADISTIC BULLYING

My experience with bullying children brings to mind the work of Stoller (1974, 1985) on the nature of sexual perversion. Characteristic of such sadistic bullying is the fetishizing of the victim, so that instead of a whole object, the victim becomes a part object only. Fetishizing or dehumanizing the victim/child through the splitting off of humanity and aliveness produces a less alive (less unique or human) fetish object, allowing the sadistic, bullying child to act out vengeful, hateful, destructive fantasies, fueled by the painful and humiliated response of the victim. My experience is that the role of hostility in bullying is similar to hostility in sexual perversions. In fact, I see bullying as a form of perversion in which the bully expresses three basic unconscious issues:

1. *Rage* at having to give up merger fantasies with the mother—that is, renouncing the mother.

2. *Fear* of not succeeding in getting away from the mother's pervasive influence.

3. *Revenge* against the mother for having been put in this predicament.

The act of bullying reverses the positions of the actors in the drama, as Stoller (1974) suggested, and also reverses the affects. The victim (of the family pathology) becomes the victor. He or she moves from the passive object of parental hostility to being the person in power, the tormentor. This manic mechanism, as Stoller pointed out, allows the child to omnipotently become the parent, and thus the perversion is a form of sublimation of these three dominant affects. The movement from danger to escape and from danger into gratification explains the intense vibratory quality of the aggressive, sexualized arousal. The bullying, as it becomes more and more intense, leads to an explosive triumph, with a "joyous," manic quality often accompanied by laughter. Whereas this situation seems extreme when applied to an elementary school child, it is not, in my
experience, a rarity. Sexual excitement may also be part of the etiology of pathological behavior in other types of bullying children.

The most clearly pathological type of bully is the sadistic one, characterized by prominent antisocial trends. He or she shows little emotional involvement with the act of bullying itself. Sadistic bullies, whose prognosis is poor, are often feared, especially if big and strong. Sadism should be distinguished from aggression: in acts of sadism, the intent is that the object visibly suffer. Mihashi (1987) called the sadistic exclusion of others kogare, an archaic Japanese term that meant marking individuals for abuse as outsiders. In the past, the Japanese culture institutionalized forms of self-humiliation as honorable rituals in order for the defeated shogun to save face, with seppuku (ritual disembowelment) being one such historical practice of samurai. In Japanese schools today, humiliated children are sometimes forced by their peers to eat grass (Mihashi 1987). That act of unpalatability contemptuously implies an animal-like nature, thus reducing the child to the humiliation of being less than human. In addition to the symbology of the act itself, it is my observation that the victim of such bullying must also be shown to be hurt, and the bullying continues until there are screams and cries and pleading, often accompanied by laughter from the bystanding audience and triumphant exultation on the part of the bully. Socially, such actions convey a message about the undesirable nature of the victim, and perhaps cement the group as a whole in a pathological way (Alexander 1986).

In an earlier clinical typology of bullying (Twemlow, Sacco, and Williams 1996), my colleagues and I described a sadistic form of child behavior. In sadistic bullies, anxiety is low, self-esteem is normal, sadism is prominent, there is little fear of discipline, and empa-

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4 Other forms of bullies and victims are more easily manageable, and are often considered in a more sympathetic way as victims of insecurity and nonmirroring mothering. As Fonagy, Moran, and Target (1993) indicated in their groundbreaking paper on violence, children of this type do not appear to be able to reflect on the nature of their own thinking (that is, to develop a theory of mind or a capacity to mentalize), but instead are caught up in the throes of the paranoid-schizoid position, with a reactive rather than reflective response to the aggression of others.
thy is lacking. Such children probably comprise about one percent of the school population. A bully of this sort often functions as a leader in the elementary grades, but usually loses most of his or her social status by the upper grades of high school. A sadistic bully has few true friends, but many followers. Frequently, parents of such children model unempathic aggressiveness in their own behavior. The mothers of these sadistic bullies, often depressed and abused themselves, vicariously achieve satisfaction from their children's sadistic precociousness, and may act it out by defending their children's actions to authorities.

There seem to be at least two ways in which the sadistic bully gains from the discomfort of the victim. One is the sadistic experience of the bullying act, requiring that the victim show discomfort. A spiraling ritual of excitement occurs in the bully, often with highly sexualized and perverse overtones. Sadomasochistic humiliation rituals are a recognized part of our culture, from the cruel blood baths of serial killers like Ted Bundy, who called himself a vampire while engaging in sexual torture of victims (Doyle and Cave 1992), to the institutionalized sadomasochism in the "S & M" parlors of San Francisco. The more humiliated the victim, the higher the level of sexual arousal in the victimizer. Experimental work on serial rapists (Marques 1981) shows that they are most aroused by submissive, pleading victims. Sadomasochistic behavior is less recognized in young children; however, the following vignette illustrates such a sexualized form of bullying:

Vignette 2: A Sadistic Bully

A fifth-grade boy, very tall and strong for his age, monopolized a great deal of classroom time because of his regular, sadistic bullying. He had even been known to threaten teachers with physical injury—quite unusual in an elementary school context. He gained great strength from the knowledge that his family could back up his threats, since his father was a prominent member of a local criminal gang. Each day, the boy was picked up from school by a tattoo-
covered, well-known "hit man." The boy delighted in showing off this man's large muscles to any friends and other students hanging around.

Much of his bullying was sexualized. He enjoyed grabbing the crotches of female classmates, who were rendered helpless by the elevation of his hand, so that they not only suffered sexual humiliation but also had difficulty standing. This would be accompanied by great laughter and clapping from his bully-bystander henchmen. He used several forms of sexualized bullying, including "humping" the display cases containing school trophies, with the intent of frightening younger children while symbolically denigrating the school's achievements.

Although the boy was placed in a special classroom, he was soon mainstreamed back into a "normal" classroom when the teacher threatened to resign if he were not removed, since she feared his physical strength and resented his total lack of concern for disciplinary procedures. The staff fantasized that the most effective procedures with this boy would involve sadistic "bullying of the bully." It emerged that the only individual able to control him was the school custodian, who had a background of aggravated assault, and who had used whispered threats of bodily harm to subdue him.

Ultimately, this boy responded quite gratifyingly to our intervention program, which made use of his charismatic leadership skills by enlisting him as an assistant instructor in the "Gentle Warrior" program. This process ameliorated his sadism and allowed the emergence of more caring and positive qualities. The physical part of the training facilitated shifts in the aggressive and sadistic components of his character structure, whereas the omnipotent aspects were satisfied by identification with a teacher as a teacher's helper, with the modeled behavior being caring and compassionate rather than dehumanizing and bullying. On a recent occasion, he was observed waiting for a school bus; a small child nearby was wailing because he was unable to tie his shoelaces. After looking around to make sure no peers were watching, the boy approached the child, leaned down, and tied the younger child's shoelaces himself!
Vignette 3: A Victim of Sexual Bullying

Sometimes, sexual bullying can lead to extreme levels of victimization, as in the recent case in Georgia of a bullied fifth-grade girl (Davis versus Monroe County Board of Education 1999), which led to a United States Supreme Court decision defining the school board's responsibility in sexual harassment. The signs of this child's victimization included failing grades and a suicide note found by the mother, reflecting the girl's extreme fear and humiliation. She experienced additional humiliation and difficulty in speaking out about the problem due to the obscene and repetitive nature of the sexual harassment, which occurred over a period of several months. In this case, the male perpetrator pled guilty to sexual battery after the girl's mother notified police. After a number of attempts to resolve this problem from within the school system, the mother had given up hope that teachers or school administrators would take any corrective action.

A PSYCHOANALYTIC SOCIAL SYSTEMS MODEL FOR THE BULLY–VICTIM–BYSTANDER INTERACTION

Having summarized the importance of the roles of sadism and sexuality in the aggressive action of bullies, I will now turn to another model for a description of the fundamental dialectical nature of the bully–victim–bystander roles. This model calls for a dynamic, interactive, social systems approach to the understanding of power struggles.

In other works, my colleagues and I have detailed the role-dependent way in which the bully interacts with the victim, influenced by the socially and personally defined roles of others in the surrounding environment (Twemlow 1995a, 1995b; Twemlow, Sacco, and Williams 1996). The modern concept of dialectic is central to a social systems approach. Concepts of dialectic are derived from the work of the phenomenologist Hegel, and have been extensively
discussed by writers such as Fonagy (1998) and Ogden (1986, 1989). The seeing of one’s self in the other person and the influence on oneself by the other are parts of an ongoing process in which human beings define themselves in regard to both their separateness and their similarities. Thus, the two opposites define each other and depend on each other for their existence; neither would exist without the other. Marcuse (1960) wrote that dialectical thought is a process in which subject and object are so joined that the truth can be determined only within the subject/object totality. It is my belief that dialectical struggles around activity and passivity form part of the contextual background in all relationships, including the analytic one, and become more conflicted if aggression begins to dominate intimacy.

Such struggles are not confined to human interactions. Dominant behavior is a well-known ethological strategy for defense in animals via flight behavior. In many primates, dominance is part of competition for resources, mates, territory, and social status, and helps maintain genetic variance within the group. Flight behavior is used to avoid danger and harm, and is phylogenetically very old (Dixon 1998). Animals—including human beings—who are exposed to inescapable threats or attacks exhibit a typical gaze-avoidant, immobile response. Dixon compared the behavior of depressed patients to such arrested flight behavior. Although the response of such a victim is not always adaptive, it at least arrests escalating fear by cutting off fear-inducing input.

In previous works (Twemlow 1995a, 1995b), I have shown how the complex dialectical interaction between victim and victimizer is fueled by the bystanding audience. Like cofactors in a chemical equation, the participants can influence the direction of the equation. The bully-victim–bystander relationship can be analogized to a mass law equation, with the bystander being the cofactor driving the relationship in either direction, as follows:

\[
\text{BULLY} \quad \leftrightarrow \quad \text{VICTIM} \quad \leftrightarrow \quad \text{Bystander}
\]
The characteristic object relationship configurations in Tables 2, 3, and 4 result from fixed, traumatic object relational units. This typology emphasizes the object relational configurations and role-dependent nature of the dialectic.

It should be noted that these dynamic categories may bear little or no relationship to statistically derived, clinical syndromes comprising DSM-IV approaches to psychiatric disease classification. Nonetheless, such psychoanalytic diagnoses suggest clear courses of treatment. Once these traumatic object relational patterns become fixed, the social system is set up for difficult-to-avoid, violent destructiveness. In the early stages of this dialectical interaction, the bully-victim-bystander roles are interchangeable in a confusing, ever-changing kaleidoscope, involving mainly the following defense mechanisms: projective identification, counterprojective identification, extractive introjection, and altruistic surrender.

Recent psychological research questions the importance of low self-esteem in causing violence. Bushman and Baumeister (1998), in a study of college students, found that negative, insulting evaluations of essays written on an emotionally charged topic, such as abortion, increased the aggressiveness of responses for all types of individuals, and that these aggressive responses were strongest among subjects who scored highly on questionnaire-assessed narcissism. The authors concluded that threatened egotism is a significant cause of aggression. Measures of self-esteem yielded no significant results. Bushman and Baumeister felt that such a view contradicts the traditional one that low self-esteem causes aggression. The results of this sophisticatedly designed study strongly suggest that narcissistic hypersensitivity promotes aggressive responses. In a useful and straightforward way, the authors distinguished high self-esteem (thinking well of oneself) from narcissism (passionately wanting to think well of oneself). In Gabbard’s (1989) classification, the hypervigilant narcissist seems the most prone to violence. Those with oblivious narcissism may brush off criticism more easily, but it is my experience that hypervigilant and oblivious responses exist in a dynamic equilibrium. It seems that those who need to validate a grandiose self-image with constant
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Main Descriptive Features</th>
<th>Relationships with Peers</th>
<th>Relationships with Teachers</th>
<th>Family Background</th>
<th>Object Relations Configurations</th>
</tr>
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Rageful vengefulness — Affect

Omnipotent, isolated, lonely; iden. w/mother — Part Object Representation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Main Descriptive Features</th>
<th>Relationships with Peers</th>
<th>Relationships with Teachers</th>
<th>Family Background</th>
<th>Object Relations Configurations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mafochistic Victim</td>
<td>High school-age girl, usually in context of a &quot;crush.&quot; Schoolwork suffers. Do not see themselves as ill, but rather &quot;in love.&quot;</td>
<td>Masochistically martyr themselves, often to a bully who is seen as worth the sacrifice.</td>
<td>Often truant, pre-occupied, distracted. Uses downers.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sad — Affect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescuing Victim</td>
<td>High school-age girl, usually in context of a &quot;crush.&quot; Schoolwork suffers. Do not see themselves as ill, but rather &quot;in love.&quot;</td>
<td>A submissive, rescuing relationship to a bully who is seen as capable of reform if handled the right way, namely, by the victim.</td>
<td>Preoccupied, distracted.</td>
<td>Repeating an observed parental pattern of rescuing.</td>
<td>Hostile, critical — Part Object Representation</td>
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<td>Helpless, controlling — Part Object Representation</td>
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<td>Omnipotent, self-sacrificing — Affect</td>
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<td>Helpless, controlling — Part Object Representation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Main Descriptive Features</td>
<td>Relationships with Peers</td>
<td>Family Relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoidant</td>
<td>Sometimes an adult in authority, e.g., a principal who denies obvious problems. Tends to be &quot;teacher's pet.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quite mature for age and aware of narrow-minded focus of peers. Liked by teachers, but not a &quot;teacher's pet.&quot; Actively intervenes to prevent power struggles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
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positive feedback respond most aggressively when that feedback is not forthcoming.

Situations of high arousal, such as fear and anxiety, create a psychophysiological response that deeply alters the permeability of psychological boundaries between victim and victimizer. In one sense, the ego boundaries of victim and victimizer fuse, creating a single entity from two minds. A primary influence of this boundary permeability is stimulated by the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. The sympathetic nervous system secretes adrenergic hormones, which activate the psyche and body in preparation for fight and flight. The parasympathetic response, through glucocorticoids, has an opposite, relaxing and calming effect. Under normal conditions, this combination of responses is adaptive and reestablishes a homeostatic balance in the body and mind. In situations of extreme fear or chronic victimization, however, such as in bullying and domestic violence, exhaustion of the adrenals can lead to a premature, exaggerated, parasympathetic calming response, creating a sleepy mental state, muscular weakness, and inhibition of the blood coagulation mechanism and immune system—thus paradoxically making the individual more vulnerable both to ego boundary permeability and to physical injury. VanderKolk (1989) coined the term traumatic bonding to explain the way in which affect psychology creates a charged object relational configuration (self and object representation), which then becomes highly cathexed due to extreme conditions at the time (e.g., contemptuous bullying). This traumatic object relational unit can stimulate a flashback, influencing later behavior in self-destructive repetition compulsions.

I have elsewhere described a form of negative intimacy between bully and victim, similar in form to lovesickness (Twemlow 1995a). Emotional dependency may develop in the same way that it does in chronic domestic violence, with a form of dependent linking of the victim and the bully. Terror and sadistic control, rather than love and caring, predominate. One victim, who described herself as “spotwelded” to her rapist, could not get him out of her mind, even changing her brand of cigarettes to his brand. Intrusive thinking, alterations of consciousness, and a sense of incompleteness, along with a
total preoccupation with the bullying attacker, are frequently described.

Social proscription enhances the lovesick experience, as well as conferring on the victim and victimizer in bullying relationships a social notoriety, embellished in excruciating detail in the contemporary media preoccupation with violence. The person I have described as the bully–bystander is vicariously identified with the bully, and the victim–bystander is vicariously identified with the victim. Both typically exhibit a similar level of fear and arousal, with ego boundary permeability, and both can participate as “cofactors” in the bully–victim dialectic, depending on which way they are polarized. The avoidant bystander who denies the existence of a problem, and the ambivalent bystander who is not caught up in the regression, have less boundary permeability and less of a maladaptive response.

A MODEL FOR POWER STRUGGLES
DERIVED FROM KLEIN/BION
AND OTHER OBJECT RELATIONAL
CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

A Kleinian object relations model for power struggles can best be illustrated first by a theoretical outline of the typical object relational configuration; second by defenses and affects synthesized primarily from the work of Bion (1967), Klein (1935), and Ogden (1986, 1989); and finally by a clinical illustration of the model that occurred in a school where fixed bully–victim–bystander power struggles resulted in lethal violence.

Projective identification is both a defense and an interpersonal communication, as pointed out by Ogden (1986). It is a way of learning about somebody else, as well as a way to disavow bad self- and object representations. Hamilton’s (1986) concept of positive projective identification highlights the potentially pathological function of the projection of good self- and object representations, when these are idealized or unrealistic. Counterprojective identification, a term coined by Grinberg (1962), is essentially an unconscious coun-
Other defenses connected with deep levels of regression, such as pathological idealization, omnipotent denial, and splitting, are often involved at various stages of the power struggle. From an economic point of view, these primordial defenses defend against the catastrophic effect of maldistribution of power, which becomes a threat to the ego. Unadulterated, undefended power creates the same subjective state that Bion (1967) described as "catastrophe" (p. 116), a state of nameless dread of cosmic proportions.

Bion's idea of nameless dread specifically referred to a meaningless fear that comes about in the context of an infant's relationship with a mother incapable of reverie. Children, and sometimes adults, who are consumed by violent feelings seem immersed in this meaningless, powerless, omnipresent terror. A key to taming the terror involves the idea of reverie as a specific form of containment (Bion 1967). The reverie of the mother is a particular quasi-therapeutic act of containment that ameliorates and transforms catastrophe. If the mother fails to contain the infant's terror, she becomes a projective identification-rejecting object, which then renders the baby's experience meaningless, as is the dread that affects both the perpetrator and victim of violence. What is reintrojected from the reverie in the capable mother is not a "fear of dying made tolerable, but a nameless dread" (Bion, p. 116). With recurrent introjection of this projective identification-rejecting object, a pathological introject forms, which destroys meaning and leaves the infant in a mysterious, meaningless, terrifying world—which may not only strip meaning from the immediate world, according to Bion, but may even give rise to a superego structure that issues meaningless injunctions about behavior. In the individual psychopathologies of violent people and of victims, it is likely that the mother reverie was not present or was defective.

One can extend this concept to a community level. The community itself can become a container, and yet if it cannot deal with the terror of the community—for example, terror in the context of violent schools—what is reintrojected is a terrifying environment of meaninglessness, lack of coordination, and especially lack of compassionate interconnectedness and helpfulness, as seems to exist in a
ter transference to the patient's projections, so that the analyst unconsciously functions according to internalized projections from the patient, unaware of the differences between his or her reactions and the patient's. Thus, the borders between self and object (or "us" and "them") are blurred and can lead to power struggles, as Ganzarain (1999) pointed out.

In the highly boundary-permeable psychophysiological state existing in trauma situations, such as that of prolonged bullying, an ever-changing, confusing mélange of mental contents defies clear delineation. The endpoint of submission with domination can involve even apparently trivial identifications, as with the brand of cigarettes of the attacker, and also more potentially lethal ones, such as a hopeless submission to the attacker—i.e., identification with the victimized self-representation of the attacker. Bollas's (1987) concept of extractive introjection is useful as a special case of "object stealing," in which the attacker extracts self-representations from the mind of the victim, leaving a feeling of being empty of thoughts and empty of the capacity to think, with a loss of the sense of one's person. Bollas considered such multiple extractions to be a "serious deconstruction of one's history" (p. 166) that can be irreparable. Such a situation exists in the chronically bullied child, who might eventually erupt with serious retaliatory aggression, either by murder or suicide.

Anna Freud's (1936) concept of altruistic surrender, not unlike Hamilton's (1986), of positive projective identification, suggests the projection of positive rather than negative ideas onto the external object. Altruistic surrender enables positive attachments to be established—with the price of self-denigration, however. Common examples include the projection of ambitions and ideals onto another person—for example, a school gang leader. Some bullies cannot tolerate a benign, loving superego; the projector may be unable to experience pleasure for him- or herself without intolerable persecutory guilt. The bully—bystander role is a frequent example of such an altruistic surrender, wherein the bystander's personal ideals and ambitions are projected onto the bully, and life is lived vicariously through this pathological identification, with often remarkable service and sacrifice to the bully-leader's whims.
Other defenses connected with deep levels of regression, such as pathological idealization, omnipotent denial, and splitting, are often involved at various stages of the power struggle. From an economic point of view, these primordial defenses defend against the catastrophic effect of maldistribution of power, which becomes a threat to the ego. Unadulterated, undefended power creates the same subjective state that Bion (1967) described as “catastrophe” (p. 116), a state of nameless dread of cosmic proportions.

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One can extend this concept to a community level. The community itself can become a container, and yet if it cannot deal with the terror of the community—for example, terror in the context of violent schools—what is reintrojected is a terrifying environment of meaninglessness, lack of coordination, and especially lack of compassionate interconnectedness and helpfulness, as seems to exist in a
number of violent school settings and in other environments that have deteriorated or have been destroyed. A common effect of such an environment of meaninglessness is that the individual is incapable of what Bion called *alpha-betization* (1967), that is, the encoding and linking/connecting of beta fragments with emotional experiences and with each other through naming, making them available for thought and for dreams, fantasy, and feelings. Containment is therefore a fundamental requirement for mental processes. The terror of falling endlessly, which Grotstein (1990a, 1990b, 1991) described as the “black hole” (an elaboration of Bion’s [1967] idea that the black hole is not an astrophysical concept), is akin to the feeling of falling endlessly, and, more generally, of being in a precarious state of imminent catastrophe.

The very destructiveness of these aggressive forces suggests a powerful, presymbolic, internal object field. The autistic-contiguous organization postulated by Ogden (1989) extended Freud’s idea that the initial ego is a body ego derived from bodily sensations. The autistic-contiguous position organizes experiences of raw sensations and perceptions on bounded body surfaces. Anxiety in the autistic contiguous positive is the anxiety of dissolution of boundedness. This form of preconceptual thinking is an early attempt to conceptualize the world in Bion’s sense. Thinkable thoughts are produced from preconceptions (beta to alpha transformation). The act of bullying and the act of violence may represent a failure to verbally symbolize and thus release catastrophic dread with attendant urgency. The act of violence, then, is an externalized symbol that binds anxiety (Alford 1997).

The terms “stomping for intimacy” and “blood brother,” often used in penitentiary settings, are ways of getting close to someone in the form of a brutal assault (Alford 1997). From this point of view, repetitive bullying is a complex set of defenses, actions, and affects. Ogden’s (1989) autistic defenses include rhythmically repetitive phenomena, like head-banging, skin-picking, and bingeing and purging—to which I add repeated bullying. These are all attempts to establish a physical sense of continuity of surface to bind catastrophic anxiety. It is rare that bullies engage in single acts, and
their violent acts are often experienced as calming. One serial killer I examined referred to his killing escapades as "like grinding meat," which he could conclude with a martini and a good night's dreamless sleep. The murders, he said, temporarily relieved him of omnipresent, paranoid, enraged feelings of isolation, accompanied by fears of "falling through space."

The bully's cohort of bully-bystander disciples often have to demonstrate their loyalty through acts of submission and even self-humiliation, a form of psychological "stomping for intimacy." Thus, a bullying child, through either individual psychopathology, family dynamics, or community psychopathology, or some combination of these, has developed an incapacity for "thinking thoughts" in Bion's (1967) sense, as well as an incapacity for mentalizing (Fonagy et al. 1997). Instead, in "seeing oneself in the other," the bully is unable to contain aggressive impulses. Under these conditions, concern for the welfare of others becomes submerged by an immediate survival need (i.e., to survive annihilation by the impulses).

There is a dramatic shift in the flexibility of interchangeable, coerced roles when the perceived enemy becomes truly an enemy. This rather complex concept has been explicated by Volkan's (1998, 1999b) idea of familiar enemy. In convincing arguments based on the study of large group and ethnic conflicts, Volkan pointed out that the enemy is a needed part of the total global identity, in order to contain the disavowed self- and object representations that for one reason or another need to be projected outside of the self. The container implicitly agrees to contain these disavowed parts while similarly projecting. A dynamic tension or armed truce may occur between familiar enemies who develop a long-standing relationship without being involved in direct conflict, or who are in conflict only sporadically. Volkan's idea was that as long as the enemy is a familiar one, there is implicit agreement for this situation to occur, so that a form of "stable instability" results.

With the production of a true enemy, conflict is inevitable; and the possibility of negotiating with the enemy is destroyed. The enemy is truly an alien, that is, neither human nor redeemable. From an object relational perspective, the container then rejects the pro-
jections of the familiar enemy, and a psychotic transformation occurs, so that the enemy comes to be perceived as a direct threat against whom attack action must be taken.

A FATAL SCHOOL POWER STRUGGLE: THE COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL MASSACRE

Perhaps the most startling present-day illustration of the complexity of the bully–victim–bystander relationship is the phenomenon of school killings over the past two years, beginning with the one in Pearl, Mississippi, on October 1, 1997, and most recently, the massacre at Columbine High School, Littleton, Colorado. According to media reports, all the fatal shootings were by Caucasian boys in nonurban schools. All the perpetrators experienced severe bullying and were social outsiders, ridiculed by their peers. Luke Woodham of Pearl, Mississippi, said, "I killed because people like me are mistreated every day. I did this to show society; push us and we will push back." Many of these children belonged to fringe groups, and all spoke quite openly about killing people. For example, in Jonesboro, Arkansas, on the day before the murders, Mitchell Johnson boasted, "Tomorrow y'all are gonna find out if you live or die."

In the Columbine High School situation, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold fit the aforementioned pattern. They were children from middle-class backgrounds, with parents involved in regular work and professional activities. Each of them had two parents. Both were involved in traditional, all-American activities, such as Little League ball games and Boy Scouts, until a year or so before the shootings. Harris applied to enter the Marines, but was denied because he had taken Luvox. They liked bowling and each had worked in a pizza parlor.

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3 For a description of this event, see Time Magazine, Special Report, May 31, 1999, p. 35.
5 Ibid.
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Virtually every student interviewed for the news media after the tragedy had been aware of this persecutory atmosphere. Until about a year earlier, the Trench Coat Mafia had “given as good as they got”: their bullying activities included the creation of threatening videotapes for school projects, the glorification of death and killing in other school assignments, and unexpectedly and paradoxically rude and physically violent responses when pleasant greetings were made to them. About a year prior, these roles had become fixed, with the White Cap Jocks as bullies and the Trench Coat Mafia minority as the outsiders/victims, while the rest of the school—including the principal, who had “no idea”⁷ of what was going on in the school—comprised the bystanding audience.

What is striking are the many red flags raised by these boys, which can be seen with hindsight as cries for help, and the fact that ignoring and minimizing their distress signals could be seen as additional indirect bullying by bystanders. The Trench Coat Mafia were given a page in the school yearbook, where their serious views were described as though the group were merely some sort of weird glee club. A further example of the omnipotent denial of the obvious, basic bully-victim-bystander dynamics was the community’s subsequent production of a plethora of denial tactics and scapegoats, including the alleging of severe mental illness, adult influence on the boys, lack of adequate surveillance and security in the schools, lack of gun control, and “liberalism” (Newt Gingrich⁸). It was Vice President Gore’s opinion that the massacre was evidence of the existence of evil in society.⁹ The idea of evil places it beyond the pale of human understanding and thus beyond a possibility of resolution without divine intervention.

These various potential explanations not only deny the facts, but also fail to explain why this event occurred in an affluent, primarily white high school (therefore, blame could not be

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⁸ See USA Today, May 13, 1999, p. 1A.
⁹ As expressed in a commentary after “Nightline—The Day After,” ABC Television News, April 21, 1999.
attributed to young, unemployed, African American men, as frequently occurs in such incidents). Our culture, in spite of being a democracy and a melting pot, has a history of persecuting outsiders. In a graphic account, a member of the Trench Coat Mafia, who was not directly involved in the shootings, described the taunting he received; he said life for members of the group was “hell, pure hell.” Athletes at the school called him a “faggot,” bashd him into lockers, and threw rocks at him as he rode his bike home. He said, “I can't describe how hard it was to get up in the morning and face that.”

Some survivors of the massacre reported that, during the killings, the gunmen were laughing with glee, as if they were enlivened by the experience; perhaps this was a form of “stomping for intimacy.” One gunman was heard to say, “This is what you get for the way you treated us.” Clearly, the victims (the Trench Coat Mafia) and the bullies (the White Cap Jocks) had disavowed their bad self- and object representations by projective identification onto each other. The omnipotent denial of the school principal, and the denial and/or conscious avoidance by other bystanders, illustrate a rich variety of defenses. If the situation were truly not obvious to the principal, counterprojective identification with denial is the likely explanation for this extreme and dangerous lack of awareness. Many students may have felt too helpless and afraid to be involved (as victim–bystanders). Some interviewed were honest enough to express chagrin at their own avoidance. Extractive introjection disempowers the self, leaving empty, helpless feelings, which perhaps explains this subjective vacuity.

The understanding provided by converging psychoanalytic explanations of these events has prompted my colleagues and me to explore to what extent the general public may be aware of these factors. In doing so, we took advantage of one of America’s great national pastimes, “Giving Your Opinion at the Diner.” A local restau-

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10 Topeka Capital-Journal, April 25, 1999: p. 13A.
11 Reported by a child interviewed on “Nightline—The Day After,” ABC Television News, April 21, 1999.
rant diner, a gathering place for many long and fascinating discussions, provided the setting for us to ask four questions of customers, seventy-one of whom voluntarily and anonymously gave their opinions concerning the Littleton tragedy. The results are summarized in Table 5.

Striking in these results are the level of awareness and strong opinions on the part of the public about community responsibility for this tragedy. The respondents in this sample believed that improved school security would likely not have prevented the disaster, and that the media, the Internet, and adults’ and children’s bullying of each other were significant contributors.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In addition to the aim of contributing to an understanding of adults’ and children’s power struggles, I have tried to apply psychoanalytic explanations of clinical phenomena—such as Freud’s principle of overdetermination—to models rather than to patients, in examining tragedies such as the Columbine massacre. Rather than addressing the problem exclusively from a particular school of thought, I have utilized the work of many outstanding clinicians, as well as the findings of many experimental and quasi-experimental studies, to present bases for these interpretations.

I have also proposed a new, combined approach to social problems, which I believe is uniquely psychoanalytic. Complex problems like violence should be approached both from a Type I perspective, using the analogy with psychoanalysis itself wherein the role of the community facilitator is like that of an analyst, and with the use of Type II sociotechnical methods, including more specific interventions in which the group learns to work together toward a common goal. Taking as a foundation Volkan’s “Tree model” and my previous work with colleagues on the “Engineered Conflict model,” I have outlined the psychoanalytic basis for a specific program intervention.

12 Doug’s Diner in Topeka, Kansas, owned by Doug Petrie.
Table 5: Public Opinion of the Columbine High School Tragedy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Percentage (Number of Respondents)</th>
<th>Percentage (Number of Respondents)</th>
<th>Percentage (Number of Respondents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think better school security could have prevented the Columbine High School tragedy?</td>
<td>40.6% (28)</td>
<td>53.6% (37)</td>
<td>5.8% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the media and the Internet contribute to violence?</td>
<td>90% (93)</td>
<td>71% (5)</td>
<td>4.9% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think adults putting each other down contributes to children's violence?</td>
<td>14.3% (10)</td>
<td>2.9% (2)</td>
<td>11.3% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think children's bullying each other in schools contributes to violence?</td>
<td>88.7% (63)</td>
<td>8.5% (6)</td>
<td>2.8% (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Type III, based on open-ended fact-finding and problem-solving dialogue, with the assistance of analytically trained facilitators. This intervention has been shown to be successful in ameliorating severe violence in an elementary school (Twemlow, Fonagy et al., in press).

It is my belief that, when combined to form this approach, the four conceptual models described in the foregoing more fully explain psychological aspects of power struggles between adults and children than do other models or any of the four alone. My colleagues and I have observed that adults are prone to create and act out socially entrenched rituals of exclusion; culturally validated exclusionary groups include, for example, country clubs and trade unions, among many others. Children also form special groups, such as clubs, cliques, sports teams, and the like, which include or exclude other children based on arbitrary criteria. Adler's (1958) group theory seems particularly useful in explaining how exclusionary processes occur within social groups. His approach postulated that all individuals have a right to membership in a group and should not have to seek or earn it. Thus, the group, in excluding others, may engender narcissistic pathology in the individual excluded, who may avoid the group (victim) or force entry (bully).

In a more individually focused study of coercive power pathology, we developed a sadomasochistic model, derived largely from Stoller's (1985) work on sexual perversion. This model describes the sexualized, repetitious, and ritualistic nature of bullying, both by adults and children, in which humiliation and dehumanization of the victim yield a sense of sadomasochistic excitement for the bully. The deep and primordial intensity of bullying, as well as the enraged and furiously destructive responses that may result, are best explained using Stoller's approach.

My colleagues and I developed the third model based on a study of literature on primates and human behaviors (Dixon 1998), as well as our own research on dominance and submission in human relationships. This social systems psychoanalytic model assumes that the roles of bully, victim, and bystander are dialectically structured. That is, they are dependent on each other, and, all other aspects being
equal, would not exist as a whole if each separate role did not exist. This belief, based on a model invoking role suction, suggests a classification and treatment of subgroups of bullies, victims, and bystanders, as outlined in Tables 2, 3, and 4. This model also allows planning of interventions that aim to alter the input and output of the social system, and to rearrange the distribution of power to correct the asymmetrical relationship between bully and victim played out before an audience of bystanders.

Finally, a model derived from Bion (1967), Klein (1935), and other object relational views has been described and illustrated by the example of the recent massacre in a high school in Colorado. This tragedy highlights the primitive defense mechanisms and self-and object relationships that can evolve and develop in a situation where all participants, including bystanders, are caught up in unconscious primitive regressive defenses, allowing serious victimization which in turn leads to lethal violence. An understanding of these primitive mechanisms is useful to explain the behavior not only of the killers, but also of the bullies—as well as that of the bystander community and staff (including the school principal), most of whom seemed stunned at their own lack of foresight.

These specific models were chosen because each one, in addition to explaining part of the phenomenon observed, suggests a practical treatment intervention. Collectively, then, these models suggest that the power struggles of subgroups need attention and examination by the larger community group, particularly of rituals of inclusion and exclusion and how the subgroup deals with outsiders. Clearly, children are at risk to occupy coercive power roles, the adoption of which can be detected early, with interventions designed accordingly for individual children.

In a subsequent paper, additional models will be described which give other perspectives on these phenomena, since these four models obviously do not represent the only ones potentially useful in explaining such complex social and individual phenomena. It goes without saying, of course, that in this paper, I have focused on psychological models, but other relevant factors include genetic sensitivity, individual psychopathology, availability of weapons, inadequate so-
cial control, and media focus—to name only some of the other broad areas that contribute to this complex public health crisis.

REFERENCES


