Routledge Research in Crises Education

CHILDREN WHO SURVIVED A SCHOOL SHOOTING AND CHOSE TO TEACH

THE CASE OF COLUMBINE, NAVIGATING SHARED TRAUMA, AND THE ETHICS OF CARE

Michelle Markert-Porter

In this compelling, thought-provoking book, Michelle Markert Porter explores the lasting impacts of the Columbine school shooting on survivors who became teachers. By examining how shared trauma shapes their relationships with students and informs their teaching practices, Porter highlights the importance of empathy, safety, and resilience in education.

Eric Madfis, *Professor of Criminal Justice, Director of the Violence Prevention and Transformation Research Collaborative, School of Social Work & Criminal Justice, University of Washington Tacoma, USA*

School shootings are distressingly common in America. Of the many students impacted by such tragedies, some, perhaps surprisingly, later choose to return to the classroom as teachers. Drawing on her own experience as a survivor of the Columbine school shooting and on interviews with others similarly affected, Michelle Porter examines how these teachers' professional practice is informed by their past, how they seek to build relationships of care and trust with their students and, importantly, what they think needs to be done to prevent future episodes of violence. There is much for teachers, administrators and parents to learn from this wide-ranging investigation.

Chris Marshall, *Emeritus Professor of Restorative Practice, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand*

This is a powerful read for all educators and those who care about schools, teachers and youth. With a deep level of care, thoughtfulness and nuance, Michelle shares her own experience of the Columbine shooting, and that of 11 of her peers who were also Columbine students and have since all become teachers. It is the type of book that only a survivor of Columbine could write, but it is one that we all need to read. It is an honour to listen in as Michelle and her participants carefully explain the ongoing impact of the Columbine shooting, personally and professionally for the individuals involved, as well as on how we view and operate as educational institutions and educators. Michelle's approach brings nuance to our understanding of school shooting research and experience, and provides ways forward if we are ready to truly grapple with school shootings.

Kristin Elaine Reimer, *Associate Professor, Education, Holistic School Well-Being & Restorative Justice Education, Cape Breton University, CA*

In Children Who Survived a School Shooting and Chose to Teach, Michelle Markert Porter shares her own experiences as a survivor of the Columbine mass shooting alongside the perspectives of other survivors who became teachers after tragedy. By weaving together the personal and professional

perspectives while amplifying the voices and lived experiences of survivors, Porter shines the light on a group often overlooked in the conversation about school safety and emergency preparedness while offering practical and tangible ways in which to help support school shooting survivors turned educators.

Jaclyn Schildkraut, *Executive Director, Regional Gun Violence Research Consortium, Rockefeller Institute of Government, USA*

Children Who Survived a School Shooting and Chose to Teach

Written from the first-person perspective of a Columbine shooting survivor, this book documents the experiences of a group of school shooting survivors who went on to become teachers.

More than 25 years after the shooting on April 20, 1999, at Columbine High School, the policies and practices in place to prevent school shootings do not seem to be working. In fact, school shootings have increased since 1999 and continue to increase. Through a phenomenological study of the author's own experiences, as well as 11 other Columbine survivors who went on to become teachers, this book examines how surviving a school shooting has impacted every aspect of their personal and professional lives. The participants offer ideas and suggestions on how to decrease school shootings, sharing candid stories about bullying at Columbine, as well as the ways that teachers helped save their lives on the day of the shooting, and their views on the idea of arming teachers. The book concludes with recommendations for survivor-informed best practices for US schools, adding an essential and often overlooked perspective to the debate around making teachers responsible for preventing school shootings.

A forward-looking and unique addition to the conversation about school shootings, this book is an essential resource for researchers, faculty, scholars, and post-graduate students with interests in education, criminology, school shootings, restorative justice, trauma studies, suicide prevention, and bullying.

Michelle Markert-Porter completed her doctorate in education in Curriculum and Instruction in 2023 at Texas A&M University, USA. She is now a Secondary Spanish and ESOL Teacher at St Patrick's College in Wellington, New Zealand.

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Children Who Survived a School Shooting and Chose to Teach

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To the children who go to school in the United States under the constant threat of school shootings, may you be "revolting children in a revolting world." To my husband, Matt, who helps me imagine a more beautiful world where people flourish. And to my children, Jeremiah and Evelyn, may you always be safe at school.

Contents

List of Important Terms

[1]Active shooter drills—drills that require students and staff to stay locked in a specific place and use emergency procedures such as being quiet, locking doors, and turning off lights in response to a person with a gun. These drills can also include tactics that include fighting, distracting the attacker, and evacuating, meant to prepare students in case of an active shooting incident in or near the school (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2021).

Care ethics—"As a relational ethic, care ethics begins its thinking—as life itself begins—in relation. We do not start with the individual, adult moral agent. Right from the start, we are concerned with the caring relation—from the briefest encounters to long-term associations, and we describe the roles of both carer and cared-for in establishing and maintaining that relation" (Noddings, 2012, p. 53).

Circles—a process and encounter where people sit in a circle for a variety of purposes, such as relationship building, peacemaking circles, and circles to address harm. The philosophy behind Circles is that all people need help and that when we help others, we are also helped as individuals. Participants are both givers and receivers at the same time in a Circle. "The participants of the Circle benefit from the collective wisdom of everyone in the Circle. Circles draw on the life experience and wisdom of all participants to generate new understandings of the problem and new possibilities for solutions" (Pranis, 2014, p. 7). Also called Talking Circles, Restorative Justice Circles, and circles for particular purposes: Community Circles, Harm Circles, and Peacemaking Circles.

Code of silence—an unwritten understanding among students discouraging them from sharing crucial information regarding dangerous plans of their peers (Madfis, 2020).

*Lockdown drills—Emergency drills that "provide an opportunity to practice a procedure to be used when there is an immediate danger or threat within the school building, including—but not limited to—an active shooter" (Schildkraut et al., 2024) that involves five standardized steps.

Moral panic—"Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible" (Cohen, 2002, p. 1).

Relational ecologies—how people in schools relate to each other in all the school settings, "how people are with each other." It includes everyone associated with a school community: all staff, teachers, administrators, students, and additional professionals such as school resource officers and counselors (Brown, 2017, pp. 55–56).

Relational pedagogy—"the systematic construction of appropriate relationships embedded within the schooling process" (Crownover & Jones, 2018, p. 18).

Restorative practices—the methods used to teach restorative concepts and skills based on the restorative values (Pointer et al., 2020).

Restorative justice—"a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible" (Zehr, 2015, p. 33).

School climate —"the quality and character of school life" focused on how people experience school life. It is based on values, interpersonal relationships, educational practices, and organizational structures (Cohen et al., 2009, p.182).

Target hardening—an approach focused on safety and security technologies such as metal detectors, surveillance cameras, school resource officers (SROs), and various lockdown procedures (Warnick & Kapa, 2019).

Threat assessment—"whether or not the accused students actually intended to carry out their homicidal plans" (Madfis, 2020, p. 87).

Zero tolerance policies—"swift and certain consequences for all incidents, major or minor…targeting both serious and less serious behaviors, are thus meant to send a clear message to potential troublemakers that certain behaviors will not be tolerated" (Skiba & Knesting, 2001, p. 20).

Note

1 *The terms "lockdown drills" and "active shooter drills" were used interchangeably by participants in this book.

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Acknowledgments

In the 2022 *Matilda* musical, based on the Roald Dahl book by the same name, the cast sings:

> We are revolting children
> Living in revolting times
> We sing revolting songs
> Using revolting rhymes
> We'll be revolting children
> 'Til our revolting's done

Madeleine L'Engle says in *A Wind in the Door* through the protagonist Meg Wallace, "It's not right in the United States of America that a little kid shouldn't be safe in school" (p. 48).

To those of us who were part of the Columbine High School community on the day of the shooting on April 20, 1999, may we have each other and keep standing up to end the sacrifice of more children to school shootings. To the children who go to school in the United States under the constant threat of school shootings, may you be "revolting children in a revolting world." We know that a Columbine is the beautiful state flower of Colorado, and not just a school shooting.

I would like to thank my doctoral committee chair, Dr. Radhika Viruru, co-chair, Dr. Sharon Matthews, and committee members, Dr. Shaun Hutchins and Dr. Krystal Simmons, for their guidance and support as I undertook my research. During the course of this research, you cared for me both academically and emotionally as I undertook this profoundly challenging and important work. Thank you. I would also like to thank my internship supervisor and colleague, Dr. Kristin Reimer, at Cape Breton University, for helping me better understand restorative practices and relational pedagogy, which help make the world a better place.

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to set up our WhatsApp chat group at our orientation in January 2020 and have academic and personal connections with each other these past three years. Thank you for helping me recognize that my topic was valuable and important to the field of education.

I acknowledge that while undertaking this research, I was on the traditional territory of the Waco, which was a band of the Wichita tribe and the Māori people of New Zealand.

As always, I am grateful to have my extra life to spend with my husband Matt and our children Jeremiah and Evelyn. Thank you for helping me to continue to heal from the trauma of the Columbine shooting. I love you.

1 Introduction

The Participants, the Author, and Epistemic Exploitation

Introducing the Participants

On the day of the shooting at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, according to the Jefferson County, Colorado Sheriff's narrative report, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold arrived at the school around 11:10 a.m., planted bombs, and shot and killed 12 students, one teacher, and themselves by 12:08 p.m. SWAT and police officers spent the next few hours responding. The shooting was considered over by 4:45 p.m. But for the Columbine survivors, the timeline continued as we waited to hear which of our classmates were alive or dead. There are detailed accounts available for those who are interested, but that is not the purpose of this book. For the participants and me, the timeline began much further back when Eric and Dylan began making plans to murder us as they sat in class with us. The timeline has continued for the past 25 years since the shooting, and it will continue for the rest of our lives. There is time before the Columbine shooting and time after the Columbine shooting. The trauma continues. It never leaves.

This book is a qualitative work that shares the experiences of Columbine student survivors in an extended narrative, giving voice to their stories in ways that previous research and the media have not done. It is also an autoethnography sharing my experiences as a student survivor of the Columbine shooting and professional career as a teacher. Our stories are powerful and are worth writing about in an extended way as we share our ongoing experience of surviving a public–private trauma, one that was watched by the whole world but lived by us. As school shooting survivors and educators, these stories add to the conversation about school shootings and how they shape education in the United States.

The 12 participants discussed in this book, including me, represented the four grade levels at Columbine High School at the time, 9th–12th grade. One participant was male, and the others were female. On the day of the shooting, three participants were in ninth grade, one participant was in 10th grade, two participants were in 11th grade, and six participants were in 12th grade.

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I had contact of varying degrees with 10 of the 11 participants during my time in high school. Only one was someone I had not met during high school, and one of the participants did not remember me, but we graduated in the same year, and I knew who she was. Two of the participants were close friends of mine during high school and one went to my church youth group. Two of the participants and I shared the same space during the shooting. Ten participants were in the school building when the shooting started. The other two were off campus at lunch. One participant was shot at and had shrapnel cut their legs. One participant was in the science classroom with Dave Sanders as he slowly bled to death. All of us experienced trauma that day and still experience trauma.

Five of the participants spent time teaching at Columbine High School. Eleven of the 12 participants have taught or currently teach in Colorado. Pseudonyms were used for all of the participants except for me. Abby has taught math for 18 years in 7th–12th grade. Anne is the director of community life and candidacy at a Lutheran seminary and previously taught high school English for over 10 years, and then was a director of curriculum and instruction and worked in administration roles for a total of 15 years of teaching and administration. Claire has been a preschool teacher for eight years with children with special needs and spent a year as a behavioral technician. Elizabeth taught first grade for 10 years and now homeschools her three daughters. Goldie has taught elementary art for 18 years. In her 16th year of education, Jamie is currently an instructional coach and previously taught sixth grade for nine years, teaching all subjects except science. Louisa is in her tenth year of teaching high school English and also is the executive director of a nonprofit organization specializing in mass shooting and trauma support. Matthew has taught for 15 years in elementary school, middle school, and high school, teaching general music, vocal music, band, and choir, and is currently teaching band and guitar. Megan taught preschool for 21 years and is now an instructional coach. Rachel is a professor of college English and has taught for 18 years. Theresa has taught sixth- to eighth-grade reading and writing, mostly with advanced students at the same school for 16 years. I have taught for 22 years in elementary, middle, secondary, and tertiary schools, teaching Spanish, English as a Second Language, and bilingual kindergarten, and currently teach secondary Spanish and English Language in New Zealand (Table 1.1).

Author's Roles and Personal Histories

I began my teaching career teaching primary school Spanish. To say that I was unprepared to teach Spanish was an understatement. I had trained to teach primary school and planned to teach middle school English. But my first job was teaching Spanish to kindergarten through sixth-grade students.

Table 1.1 Participants

Participant	*Year Graduated Columbine*	*Years in Education*	*Grade Levels/ Subjects Taught*	*Current Work*
Abby	2000	18	7th–12th grade/ Math	Teacher of Algebra II and Advanced Placement Statistics
Anne	2000	15	High school/ English, Director of Curriculum & Instruction, and administration	Director of Community Life and Candidacy at a Lutheran seminary
Claire	1999	8	Preschool	Teacher of three to five-year-olds, neurotypical and neurodiverse
Elizabeth	2001	10	First grade/all subjects	Stays at home with her three children, homeschools
Goldie	1999	18	Kindergarten–sixth grade/art	Elementary art teacher
Jamie	2002	16	Sixth grade/all subjects except science, Instructional coach	Instructional coach
Louisa	1999	10	High school and college/English	High school 12th-grade English teacher and yearbook advisor, executive director of a nonprofit organization specializing in mass shooting and trauma support
Matthew	2002	15	Elementary school, middle school, high school, general, music vocal, band, and choir	Band and guitar teacher and fifth–eighth grade
Megan	1999	21	Preschool teacher, instructional coach	Instructional coach
Rachel	1999	18	College professor/ English	College English professor
Theresa	2002	16	Sixth–eighth grade teacher/reading and writing	Sixth–eighth grade reading and writing teacher

Note: This information represented the participants' careers at the time of the interviews.

Although I initially felt unprepared to teach the content, I understood the importance of building relationships with students. This was difficult with three schools and more than 200 students, but I worked diligently to learn all of my students' names and to build a positive classroom climate in the Spanish program. As I have continued in various teaching settings, with different age groups, subject matter, and types of students, I have maintained my focus on building relationships with my students. This is an area of strength for me as a teacher and one that I believe is fundamentally important for all teachers. I have recognized the importance of and need for more professional development and teacher preparation in our subject materials, and also in how we interact with our students. Classroom management and student behaviors take up a good deal of our time and energy as teachers. I believe this aspect of teaching is about relationships in our classrooms. I understand my role as a teacher as someone who builds relationships with my students based on care and trust. I believe those relationships to be fundamental to the learning that occurs in my classroom. A positive school environment and classroom culture are essential for academic learning to occur and for schools to be safe.

Due to some personal trauma and health emergencies in my family, teaching became increasingly taxing on me, even though I loved the work that I was doing and my students. I decided it was a good time to reconsider graduate school and pursue my professional goal of teaching college again. I began a Doctorate of Education in Curriculum and Instruction in January of 2020. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States a few months later in March 2020, I began looking for a job closer to home and found a part-time Spanish teaching job for early toddlers through sixth graders at a private school. I continued desiring to work with teachers in a coaching role or educating preservice teachers.

If I had followed my passions and interests, I would have continued seeking a way to teach preservice bilingual teachers. However, a personal experience during my senior year of high school completely altered the rest of my life, including what I chose to study in graduate school, and this book that I have written.

Many of you remember watching the Columbine High School shooting news coverage on April 20, 1999. You may have been in a classroom watching with other students, and a teacher like I was. But I was inside the building on that day. It was my senior year of high school, and I was at lunch when the shooting began. After hiding under my lunch table, I ran upstairs when the shooting moved inside, and Mr. Dave Sanders, a Columbine teacher and coach, told us all to run. One of my friends and I ran up the stairs and darted into a freshman science classroom. We spent three hours hiding under tables, hiding near the wall, listening to the radio, watching the news coverage on TV, playing games, feeling terrified, and then finally leaving with the SWAT team.

I had already declared elementary education as a major at the university I would be attending out of state in the fall, and I was awarded a Dave Sanders Memorial Scholarship in honor of our coach and teacher who lost his life during the shooting. I remember feeling conflicted about receiving the scholarship that came from this tragedy, and maybe even some pressure along with accepting it. School had always been a place of safety and refuge for me, and now it was a place of unthinkable trauma, anxiety, and pain.

Throughout my career as a teacher, I have spent time in lockdown drills, safety training, and anti-bullying professional development. I understood that school culture and climate and teacher–student relationships were vital to school safety. However, I did not want to study school shootings because the idea overwhelmed me and left me feeling hopeless. I thought the best I could do was advocate for the mental health of students and teachers, and always report anything that concerned me about a student.

When I began my doctoral program, I came in with two areas of interest: bilingual education and school shootings. I thought I would end up writing about bilingual education because I thought I was too biased and too close to the issue to write about school shootings. I also did not know if I had the emotional stamina to spend so much time researching and writing about a topic that felt hopeless to me. I knew that I could not solve the problem of school shootings, and I would not be able to eliminate them. I imagined myself teaching preservice bilingual teachers in Texas and was excited to prepare myself for that career. I enjoyed collaborating with other teachers to improve the curriculum, teaching practices, and meeting students' needs. One of my strengths is encouraging the students and teachers that I work with and building relationships of trust and care. However, as I continued researching, the issue of disproportionality in disciplinary practices kept coming up, along with the idea of school culture being intricately linked to school safety. If the exclusionary disciplinary policies and practices that we have been using are not effective at preventing school shootings and lead to a poorer school climate while also disproportionately affecting students of color, why are we still using them?

Once I discovered qualitative research, auto-ethnography, and phenomenology, I realized I could use my personal experience for this book. I found many articles about the Columbine shooting addressing the causes of the shooting, who to blame, zero-tolerance policies, safety measures, target hardening, bullying, and mental health concerns. I wanted to know what researchers have learned from my school shooting so that I could share that information with other teachers and school personnel. I hoped to find some definitive data that would help schools be safer. However, as I kept researching, there was no cohesive narrative about school rampage shootings. Even what is classified as a school shooting is not agreed upon. I desire to help fill in the gap in the literature and to add to the research on what can help prevent school shootings.

Many of the policies and practices that we currently use were reactionary after the Columbine shooting, based on fear, with no empirical evidence that they help prevent future shootings. We have zero-tolerance discipline policies if a student brings anything to school that could be considered a weapon. We train teachers in lockdown drills and how to stop the bleeding in case of a shooting. We equip classrooms with glass-shattering devices in case we need to escape from a person with a gun. We arm teachers and other school personnel to shoot at a possible school shooter. We plan for the next school shooting because we have not done what is necessary to prevent more school shootings. As a country, we are not willing to change the gun laws and gun culture to ensure that our children are safe at school. As I came to grips with this reality, it devastated me. But I chose to keep working for safer schools where children can flourish.

My research led me to threat assessment teams that have successfully thwarted school shootings when students have shared information with trusted adults. My personal healing journey has led me to restorative justice (RJ) and restorative practices (RPs) as a way of being in relationships with people and managing conflict. By building relationships of trust in our schools through using RPs, we are much more likely to use threat assessment teams effectively to identify students who are at risk of violence and offer them the support and services they need.

After reading the literature on school shootings, I recognized that I have been written about by researchers but have not had a voice in the research. As a survivor of a school shooting that has changed and shaped how we address school safety, and as a teacher, I have a unique perspective on school safety. I have an understanding of the challenges teachers face in building relationships with their students while also assessing students for possible risk of violence. I wondered if other Columbine shooting survivors who went on to be teachers have also come to understand our role as relationship builders as a way of preventing future school shootings. My book is a phenomenological study of other Columbine shooting survivors who went on to become teachers to see what they have learned from their experience. Their perceptions and experiences, along with the relevant literature, influenced the design of an artifact to support school personnel in creating safer schools. My book focused on the development of survivor-informed best practices for schools regarding school safety. The media and politics have dictated the narratives of school shootings since the Columbine shooting, and my book gives a voice to survivor teachers to change the dialogue surrounding these horrific events.

Epistemic Exploitation

While the participants in this study were willing to speak with me, it should not be expected that school shooting survivors share their story if they do not want to. Berenstain (2016) coined the term "epistemic exploitation" to define the phenomenon of "when privileged persons compel marginalized persons to produce

an education or explanation about the nature of the oppression they face" (p. 570). The literature on epistemic exploitation has traditionally looked at the experience of Black people, People of Color, women, and lesbian and gay men as they are expected to educate those around them about their experience.

This book argues that school shooting survivors fit into this category of marginalized persons being expected to educate the privileged around them, mainly people who have the power to make decisions about school safety: the media, politicians, and researchers publishing about school shootings. When school shooting survivors' voices are included, they are often asked to prove that they have experienced trauma, discuss their resilience and what good has come from their experience, and add to the knowledge about preventing school shootings. But as seen in this book, the topic of gun reform is often silenced, survivors are negatively judged if seen as being too emotional or angry, and are asked to "uphold(s) dominant conceptual schemas by maintaining the illusion that there simply are no viable alternatives" (Berenstain 2016, p. 587). This book gives voice to opinions and experiences from survivors that are not often included in the media stories or research about school shootings or are included in an attempt to appear to have engaged with alternative ideas but actually, "The dominantly situated feign engagement with the marginalized but refuse to listen to them. They do not invite them to update, reframe, or contribute to the discourses they control" (Berenstain 2016, p. 587).

I experienced this while completing my research and publishing this book. While I had great support and encouragement from people within the fields of school shooting research and prevention, I also received negative feedback. I was told that this book has no place in the market and there are no classes where it could be used. While the feedback acknowledged that survivor voices have a place in the research, it also said that I need to be more neutral, objective, and focused on the evidence. I was also told that survivor experiences are important and should be included in the conversation, "but evidence-based recommendations must always be prioritized." Survivors are rarely included in the research, and if we only allow their voices to further support what the dominant narrative wants to say about school shootings, that is epistemic exploitation. There will never be new evidence if we do not allow emotion and experience to influence the research. This book intends to update, reframe, and contribute to the discussion about school shootings in the United States.

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2 Data Analysis and Research Paradigm

Solution and Method

The Problem

Since US gun policies continue to make access to weapons easy, schools continue to need alternative means of mitigating the increasing number of school shootings occurring around the country. Addressing school violence requires a holistic approach on the macro-ecological level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hong et al., 2011). Preventing school violence is not enough. We must figure out why children want to kill each other in the first place (Muschert & Madfis, 2014), address the larger societal issues of violence of all types, and then create a school climate where this is less likely.

Proposed Solution

My book is focused on the development of survivor-sensitive best practices for school safety. School shooting survivors who reenter the school setting face difficult trauma from the past shooting and also from the current policies and practices in place for school safety in many schools. The environment surrounding lockdown drills is unhealthy for all students and teachers, but especially for school shooting survivors. In my study, I found that many survivors are not valued for their knowledge and expertise on school safety and are often ignored or insulted when they bring up their concerns and ideas. This book gives voice to their lived experience, their expertise, and their knowledge about school shootings. It opens up the conversation around school shootings to include school shooting survivors who are also teachers. These are important voices to add to the complex conversation around school shootings in the United States.

I used a qualitative research design and a phenomenological approach to interview other Columbine survivors who chose to teach as a career after surviving a school shooting. I used interviews, autoethnography, and

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elicitation as my data collection methods. Based on these methods, I created a document on survivor-sensitive best practices for schools regarding school safety. Similar to documents put out by suicide prevention groups about reporting on suicides and mass shootings, this document provides information and resources to create a survivor-sensitive school safety policy.

Outline and Justification of the Proposed Solution

My book is focused on the sharing of survivor stories and the development of a document about survivor-sensitive best practices for school safety. It includes recommendations for lockdown drills and active shooter training, inviting school shooting survivors to be part of a school safety team, not using the language of blame for school shooting victims, and resources for survivors created by other school shooting survivors, as seen in Figure 2.1.

This document is based on the expertise of Columbine survivors who are teachers and the depth of knowledge that they possess. Schools continue to use school safety policies and procedures that are particularly traumatic to school shooting survivors. The practices are not effective, necessary, or kind. Schools can do a better job of supporting school shooting survivors, and this document will help them do so.

Justification #1 for this Book

The current safety and school violence prevention policies are ineffective at best and harmful at worst (Borum et al., 2010; Perlstein, 2000; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Warnick & Kapa, 2019). They lead to a more negative school environment and disproportionate disciplinary actions. Anti-bullying programs, mental health services in schools, and threat assessment teams are effective ways to help prevent school violence, but they depend on relationships of trust among students and teachers. One way to do this is to listen to Columbine survivors share best practices regarding school safety. As a survivor of the Columbine shooting who is a teacher, the participants and I have a unique perspective on school safety. The survivor-sensitive best practices document I created has the potential to help school shooting survivors be less traumatized reentering a school setting and offers the support they need to function well at school as students and teachers.

Justification #2 for this Book

The media played a huge role in the Columbine shooting and still continues to dictate the narrative of that school shooting and other school shootings. This book gives voice to a specific set of survivors who have not had their

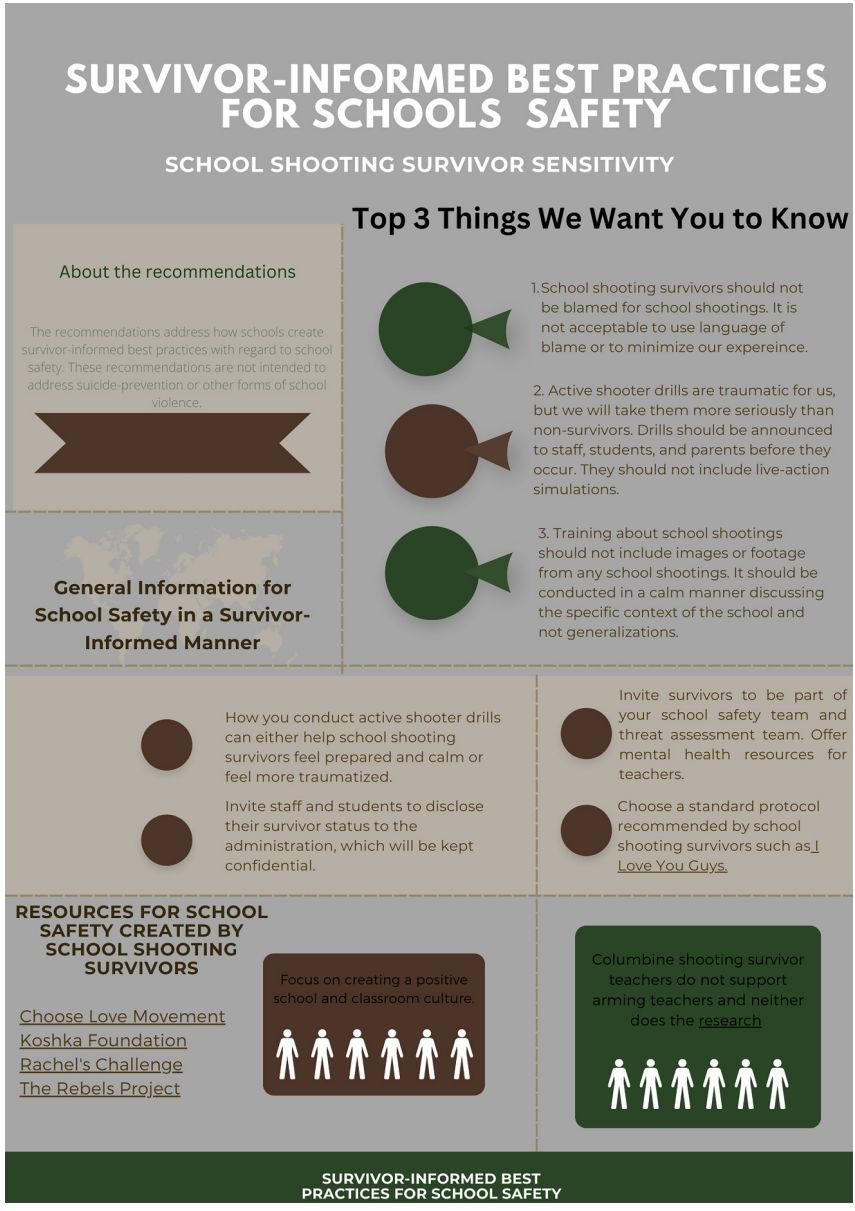

Figure 2.1 Survivor-Informed Best Practices for School Safety: School Shooting Survivor Sensitivity.

stories told from a research perspective. The media controls the narrative of school shootings. Many survivors of the Columbine shooting have been interviewed by the media, but the story is dictated by the media personnel. My book is innovative in the field because it is written by a survivor who knows the participants. We share a phenomenological aspect of our lives and have a previous relationship. My book is a solutions-based product to address school violence because it gives a voice to teacher-survivor educators. They have a unique expertise in the field, and their voices need to be heard by as many people as possible to transform the narrative surrounding school shootings and school safety. It also includes photographs of the elicitation items that participants shared. The items represent how the survivors want to be seen and what they want people to know of them as opposed to the photographs that have been chosen by the media showing us in moments of trauma. The book and photographs allow the participants to take control of the narrative of being a Columbine survivor.

Study Context and Participants

To gain an understanding of how Columbine High School shooting survivors who have become teachers build relationships with their students, I used a phenomenological inquiry approach, situating my research within a very specific phenomenon in education: school shootings intersecting with survivor teachers. I specifically want to understand the intersectionality of surviving the Columbine shooting with being a teacher.

My study had 12 participants, including me, through autoethnography. The group of Columbine shooting survivors is small, and the subset of Columbine survivors who became teachers is even smaller. I included men and women in the study who represented the four grade levels in the high school. I chose this particular sample because I wanted to get a broader picture of the experience of survivor teachers by including men and women and participants who were of different ages at the time of the shooting. I included participants who taught different grade levels and subjects during their teaching career. I also included participants who chose to teach at Columbine High School as well as participants who taught in schools other than Columbine. I obtained the sample by posting in the Columbine survivors' Facebook group and then following up with direct messages to people who expressed an interest in participating in the study. This specific group can offer a unique perspective on school shootings and speak for themselves instead of having politicians, the media, and the public speculate about what it was like to be a student at Columbine High School and what teachers need to be doing to stop school shootings.

Research Paradigm

The study was a qualitative phenomenological study. The specific phenomenon that I addressed was students surviving the Columbine High School shooting on April 20, 1999, and then those who made career decisions to become teachers. I wanted to understand how these teachers understand their choice of teaching as a profession after having survived a school shooting and hear about their student relationships. The epistemological framework I operated out of was constructivist in nature. I, as the researcher, got to know the participants as adults and spent time with them through interviews. The participants and I constructed a social reality out of which we operated and influenced how we understood the phenomenon of surviving the Columbine shooting.

As Bhattacharya (2017) outlines, "It is your positionality (alignment of epistemology, ontology, theoretical, and methodological perspectives) that will bring you the depth and clarity you need to answer questions" (p. 47). My positionality puts me within the qualitative field of phenomenology, and the following example from Bhattacharya (2017) explains what I want to do:

> If a qualitative researcher is trying to understand someone's experiences, then s/he conducts a study where s/he collects all relevant information surrounding the experience and reports them. The goal is to simply understand and explore in an in-depth manner and not to generalize…I want to do this research because I think that the stories that these women have to tell have not been heard or documented in academic spaces or perhaps needs more documentation. These stories are part of the history of education that are currently undocumented or poorly documented. (p. 19)

There are many articles, research, and books written about Columbine survivors, but not many written by Columbine survivors or including their voices. Around the 20th anniversary of the Columbine shooting in 2019, there were some media interviews with survivors who are now teachers, but there was no research or data analysis to go along with these short documentations of their experiences.

By conducting a phenomenological study, I give readers "a privileged view of the meaning of that experience from the perspectives of the participants" (Beck, 2021, p. 1). Through interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), the use of a small sample size allows for an in-depth look into the "life-world" of the participants and their personal experiences without trying to make an objective point about that experience (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 53).

There is a gap in the literature addressing school shooting survivors who enter the teaching profession, and there is very little research with Columbine

survivors as participants. There is one PhD dissertation written by a fellow Columbine survivor, on post-traumatic growth and spiritual well-being with Columbine survivors as participants (Bruns, 2013). Another PhD dissertation was written by someone who did not have an affiliation with Columbine in a religious studies program focused on memory framing and how community members in Littleton were still mourned (Stillman, 2008). Mateer and Dickman's (2014) dissertation is a case study of two teachers who experienced a school shooting or a school shooting threat during their professional careers. A small case study was conducted by O'Connor Duffy and Mooney (2014) that looked at how witnessing a shooting at school affects a teacher psychologically and professionally, and the resources needed to help the teachers. They used qualitative narrative inquiry to interview two teachers. My study expounds on these ideas from the perspective of student survivors who went on to become teachers. Harding et al. (2002) used a qualitative case study of the Heath High School shooting in Kentucky in 1997 and the Westside Middle School shooting in Arkansas in 1998. Their methods included observations and interviews with many community members, including some survivors. The use of interviews with Columbine survivors who became teachers addresses this gap. A qualitative constructivist phenomenological study allowed the voices of Columbine survivors who are teachers to share their own stories and make meaning of their lived experiences and professional choices, and relationships with their students through the lens of the phenomenon of surviving a school shooting and then deciding to become an educator. Employing this research design represented an innovation in the field because I gave a voice to Columbine survivors in an academic setting.

The design I chose represents the most appropriate approach for this project because I am also a survivor of the Columbine school shooting who went on to become an educator. I wanted to hear from my peers and friends about their experiences and how it has shaped their teaching career. My insider positionality gives me access to a participant group that other researchers cannot access. Giving these participants a space to share their stories and understand and explain how trauma has shaped their teaching career is important and could only be done through a qualitative phenomenological study combined with my autoethnographic story and elicitation.

Data Collection Methods

Phenomenological inquiry is both a theoretical and a methodological framework. Within phenomenology, I combined the use of different methodologies: phenomenology, autoethnography, and elicitation.

First, phenomenology aims to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of life experiences, allowing readers to understand more fully what participants

experienced (Beck, 2021). I used phenomenology by interviewing Columbine survivors who experienced the shooting firsthand and then chose to become teachers. My interview questions included opportunities for participants to share their stories regarding the day of the shooting and the time period shortly after, and to narrate experiences and events related to their teaching career and relationships with students. This study involves interviews by Zoom because I live outside the United States and was unable to conduct in-person interviews. I conducted the interviews and the data collection following the core beliefs and principles of RJ as defined by Evans and Vaandering (2016) that all human beings are worthy and interconnected and share the desire to connect to others in good ways. The values supporting this belief are respect, dignity, and mutual concern. I believe this is true for all participants in this study, and I interacted with them using the following three components of RJ in education (RJE) as outlined by Evans and Vaandering (2016):

1 Creating just and equitable learning environments: "Ultimately, the purpose of RJE is to create spaces of belonging that embrace everyone in the ways they require" (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p. 9). This refers to all the components of an individual, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, language, sexuality, etc.

   Some ways I embodied this value was by giving participants questions in advance to prepare for the interview, which had the potential to be emotional, invited them to review my notes and meet with me again to further our conversation, and respecting their decisions to meet one or two times and use the elicitation item they chose.
2 Nurturing healthy relationships: "acknowledges that social and emotional health is critical for learning and living…respect, inclusion, conflict resolution, reciprocal learning and teaching, decision making, etc., are integrated within all aspects of education" (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p. 10).

   To do this, I connected with participants on a human level before going into interviewer mode. I asked about their day, their current situation in life, and asked if they had a plan for after the interview to help them regulate.
3 Repairing harm and transforming conflict: "conflict and harm are a normal part of life and often provide opportunities for learning and transformation" (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p. 10). With RJ, the following are essential aspects: being part of a community, clear communication about the harm experienced to the relationship, desiring accountability from those who have done harm to make repairs, and addressing the needs of those harmed and those who caused harm.

While there was not much conflict during the interview process, I did acknowledge when one participant was frustrated that I did not get the interview questions to her with much time to prepare them. Two participants and I also

acknowledged the strangeness of the interview process as we were together on the day of the shooting, and they recognized that our experience and memories may have been different. They were willing to share their experiences but were also concerned about how what they shared would affect me.

Second, I used autoethnography to gain deeper insight into my own experience and gain more understanding of a small group of teachers as they made meaning of how surviving a school shooting influenced their decision to be a teacher and their relationships with their students. By practicing reflexivity, I gained a deeper understanding of telling stories that "are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 1). Autoethnography is looking inward at my own thoughts and feelings, and experiences and outward at my relationships and culture, allowing me to confirm and contradict my experiences with the stories of my participants (Adams et al., 2015). I revisited old journals, photographs, newspaper articles, and letters for the autoethnographic section. I also read sections of Dave Cullen's (2009) *Columbine* to further understand the event, the aftermath, and the experiences of my participants.

Third, elicitation involves the use of an outside item that participants provided that has meaning for them related to the phenomenon that can spawn conversation. I used elicitation during the interviews to engage further with participants about their experience surviving the Columbine shooting. I asked the participants in advance of the interviews to bring their elicitation items with them for the interview. I did not intend to "trigger" any post-traumatic stress reactions in my participants, but I do recognize that by engaging in this study, there was the chance and likelihood that participants and the researcher (me) experienced stress and negative emotions as we reflected on, remembered, and recounted our experiences. Elicitation was in the form of pictures, clothing, memorabilia, and items participants kept after the shooting that are meaningful to them. I included photos of the elicitation items.

Justification of Instruments

I used three types of instruments to collect data: interviews, autoethnography, and elicitation. The use of these three instruments fits with the phenomenological framework of the study as they give voice to the participants to share their experiences firsthand.

Interview Questions

I used interview questions that I wrote based on the literature review and my own personal experience with the Columbine shooting, and my career as a teacher. I piloted a few of the questions with Columbine teachers who were

teaching at the time of the shooting. The sample set for those interviews I ended up with was also a subset of teachers who continued their teaching careers at Columbine. This led to a theme that I looked for in the interviews with participants for this book. The idea that teachers "should do whatever it takes to keep their students safe" and what that means for different teachers came out in my pilot interviews, and I wanted to see if this same idea is reflected in the interviews presented here. It did come out some but not with the same intensity, and was more nuanced to include the role of access to guns.

Autoethnography

A researcher declares their positionality and biases when conducting research. But since I am part of the phenomenology that I studied, my story should also be included. I know that I feel very differently from some of my interviewees, and this was part of my autoethnographic story. I have also experienced transformation and healing while writing the literature review, and the same happened as I conducted interviews with participants. This reflexive element was valuable to my study. I shared my experience of a cultural phenomenon that will allow readers to have insider knowledge that is not possible for outside researchers (Adams et al., 2015).

Elicitation

While most research on elicitation has been about the use of photographs, any item that involves visual information allows the brain to utilize different parts when using more than just words (Harper, 2002). The elicitation items allow the participants to evoke emotions and enter a different part of consciousness to share their experiences with readers (Harper, 2002). Individually contributed elicitations offer participants a way to determine what they want to share and talk about and from which to make meaning. Experiencing trauma alters the brain and physiology of the body and requires a connection between brain and body for regulation and some type of healing to occur (van der Kolk, 2014). By engaging with elicitation, the study used visual images to engage the preverbal parts of the brain and allowed participants and readers to imprint new images associated with Columbine and the participants in their brains. This is an important part of the study because much of what the world remembers of the Columbine shooting are specific photographs and video images chosen by the media and schools for training purposes. The use of elicitation allowed participants to share the items and photos that they want people to see and know about them, instead of allowing the media to control the narrative of our lives and dictate what images the world sees and knows of us. This study allowed participants to give the reader an image of themselves that they want to be seen and remembered.

Data Analysis Strategy

The ontological framework is one of multiple realities and different perspectives. By including direct quotes from teachers, I demonstrated the varying experiences, meanings, and realities understood and constructed by the participants. My methodological framework of using a phenomenological inquiry allowed for a general plan for research but left room for flexibility and constructivist activity to occur as data were collected and analyzed. My research purpose, theoretical framework, and methodology were aligned to allow for participants to share and create understanding and meaning about their experiences as Columbine survivors and teachers and for me to analyze their responses for common themes surrounding building relationships of trust with students and feeling an expectation that teaching may require the sacrifice of our lives to protect those in our care.

By combining different approaches and methodologies, I was able to triangulate my data, look for recurring themes presented in different ways, and tell a richer, more in-depth narrative.

After conducting initial individual interviews with all participants, they had the opportunity to check transcripts for accuracy. From there, I analyzed the data for common themes surrounding the ideas of reasons for choosing teaching as a profession, how the shooting impacted participants' lives, and how participants build relationships with students. I looked for similarities and differences in responses. I also answered the questions myself.

I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis to familiarize myself with the data, generate initial codes, look for themes, review the themes, define and name the themes, and produce the report. I began by looking at how participants answered each research question, then went line by line to code for themes. I used in vivo coding when participants' own language was repeated, and it provided the best way to capture the data. I used concept coding when an item "suggests an idea rather than an object or observable behavior…Concepts also refer to processes such as surviving or coping" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 66). Emotion coding and values coding were also relevant for the data analysis of this study. Then, I fit the codes into possible categories. I then synthesized the categories and looked for emerging patterns. There was a large quantity of data, so I spent time thinking about what I had heard and read. As I coded the data, I looked for saturation when the quotes started repeating or being very similar. This allowed me to know when I was through finding new themes. Another way that I knew I was finished analyzing the data was when I was able to add in themes that emerged that were not what I initially thought would come out of the data, or did not align with the data in my autoethnography.

I analyzed what I wrote in the autoethnographic section to see if my experience as a survivor and a teacher is similar to or different from my

participants. The analysis showed the transformation that I have experienced as a result of the shooting, in my career as an educator, and by engaging in this study. I analyzed what I wrote through the lens of autoethnography as caring for the self as I engage in this study to work something out, and as I ensure that I am caring for myself as I revisit my own trauma and also the trauma of my participants (Adams et al., 2015).

I checked my data analysis with my committee to ensure inter-rater reliability. This was especially important due to my insider positionality with participants and experiencing the phenomenology being studied.

Author Positionality

I was the researcher and a participant in this phenomenological study. By combining my autoethnographic data, I bracketed my thoughts and ideas from those of my participants while also showing how my experience and this study interacted with the research. I survived the Columbine High School shooting on April 20, 1999. If the shooters had been successful with their plan, I would have died that day. This trauma influences who I am as a person and as a teacher. It affects my professional and personal life. I experience being a teacher differently than colleagues who have not survived a school shooting.

Because I know most of the participants personally, I already had a rapport with them and a trust that is not available to outside researchers. Many Columbine survivors are reticent to do media interviews. Most researchers do not have access to Columbine survivors to give voice to their phenomenological experience in an academic setting. My former relationships with the participants and our continued connection through our experiences were vital to this study. Tillmann-Healy (2003) talks about friendship as a way for researchers to engage in research through the lens of friendship "with an ethic of friendship, a stance of hope, caring, justice, even love" (p. 735). Since I already have a level of friendship with my participants, I engaged in the reverse process that Tilmann-Healy describes. I added a researcher role to an already-established friendship and needed to be mindful of the ethic of responsibility I have for this friendship while researching.

My interview questions were based on my own experience as a Columbine survivor and the relationships that I have with participants. Some of the interviews I conducted were talks with old friends, and reconnecting. This level of familiarity was important to allow participants to be vulnerable and share about a deeply traumatic experience.

Before collecting data, I hypothesized that my participants would also build more intentional relationships with their students as I have done. I hypothesized that it is based on our experience of surviving a school shooting. The media framed the story around bullying and the school climate at Columbine,

and I hypothesized that participants would have worked to address these areas with the relationships that they have with students and the culture they cultivate in their classrooms.

I suspected that I would find that participants either agree strongly with my belief that arming teachers is a terrible idea and that addressing school climate is essential for preventing school shootings or that they strongly oppose this idea and believe in target hardening and creating a safe school through building modifications and lockdown drills. I conjectured that I would find other participants who believe in RPs to prevent school violence even if they do not use this terminology. I consciously chose not to include questions about RJ or RPs so as not to lead participants to this theme if it was not something that would have come out on its own.

Readers can have confidence in my analysis because I bracketed the autoethnographic data separately from the interview questions. I was also transparent throughout the study with my own implicit biases and the transformation that I experienced while conducting the study.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I included multiple elements that allow readers to have confidence in the credibility and dependability of my study.

Credibility is used in qualitative research instead of validity. I included context-rich, detailed descriptions, looked to see if the findings seemed plausible, used triangulation across sources and methods, had guiding principles leading the study, sought out negative cases, and considered rival explanations (Yilmaz, 2013). Due to the thick descriptions of my participants and my insider positionality, the data and analysis have credibility. I gave participants a chance to look over what I wrote from their interviews to ensure that I captured their experience accurately and conveyed what they intended.

In qualitative research, dependability is the goal instead of reliability. My research questions and design of the study were congruent, the researcher's role was described and my insider positionality was explained, meaningful parallels across data sources were sought out, and peer and colleague review were employed (Yilmaz, 2013).

To ensure credibility and reliability, I triangulated data with interviewees, Zoom recording transcription notes, my own notes from interviews, and allowed participants to review the transcripts. I followed up with participants as I wrote my findings to ask questions that would give more detailed background information about the participants and clarify their responses. I frequently looked back at the interview transcripts and the notes I took during the interviews as I conducted data analysis. I typed reflections on my field notes and wrote out new ideas that emerged or surfaced while re-reading or analyzing the codes and themes.

To ensure confidentiality for my participants, I did not include the specific names of the participants, but some information is connected to participants, such as the year of graduation, etc.

While the participants have individual experiences, and the Columbine shooting was a unique historical event, some conclusions from my study can be applied to similar settings, contexts, and people. Other school shooting survivors who go on to be teachers may share similar stories and experiences with the participants in my study. The stories of my participants are worth hearing.

Introducing the Analysis

The data collection took place between September 2022 and January 2023 through interviews with the 11 participants. There were 24 questions in the first interview and eight questions in the follow-up interview. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to two hours. Eleven of the 12 participants took part in both interviews. In the first interview, I asked for an elicitation item and explanation, an item that has meaning for them surrounding the shooting. Participants shared verbally or in writing and sent photos of their items. I sent a transcript of the interview with my notes and the Zoom transcription to participants before our second meeting to allow them to respond to what I had recorded. They were invited to correct anything, elaborate on any parts, or ask me not to include anything that we talked about. Participants shared their trust in me and my research with statements like Jamie's remark, "I'm not worried about you misrepresenting or exploiting my story." I took as detailed notes as possible and cross-checked my notes with the Zoom transcription.

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, I began initial data analysis before the last participant responded and was able to have her first interview. I read them initially in the order that interviews were conducted; during phase one, I familiarized myself with the data and took initial notes. When I went through the transcripts to clean them up and read them all the way through, I made a matrix and highlighted sections that answered questions from the interviews. I started noticing certain themes: parenting, sad but necessary lockdown drills, and minimizing; so, I started highlighting those as I went. I went back and reread, coding every line in every interview. I followed the same process for the second interviews. I let the data percolate and spent time thinking about the interviews, what participants said, and what I thought and felt about the interviews.

In vivo coding, as well as concept coding, emotion coding, and value coding, provided the majority of the themes and categories that emerged. Due to the nature of this being a qualitative phenomenology, it was important for the participants' words and voices to speak for themselves.

Closing Thoughts on Chapter 2

The phenomenon of the Columbine shooting affected many people all over the world and continues to influence school policy and practice. The people most affected by the shooting are the survivors of the event. My study gives voice to Columbine survivors who chose a career in education and seek to understand their experiences. The methodology of my study used phenomenology, autoethnography, and elicitation because this is the most appropriate way for school shooting survivors to share their stories and have their voices heard. Hopefully, their experiences and reflections will add to the research about what helps prevent school shootings, but also what promotes positive school environments. The study also aimed to allow Columbine survivors to share their stories and the images as they want the world to see them and what they want schools to do to be safer.

This study led to the creation of a survivor-sensitive best practices for school safety document. The findings from this study highlighted how teachers who have experienced one of the most researched school shootings build relationships with their students with the hope of preventing future school shootings.

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3 The Problem

School Shootings Are Increasing

Although school violence, in general, is decreasing, school shootings are on the rise in the United States. The policies and practices in place for school safety are not doing enough to prevent school violence and get to the root of why children would want to kill.

One way schools are responding to school shootings is by expecting teachers to act as first responders during violent situations. "First responders, including law enforcement, firefighters, emergency medical services, and disaster response teams," are people with specialized training who arrive on the scene of an emergency to provide assistance (Ko et al., 2008, p. 399). Ko et al. (2008) explain, "By virtue of their acknowledged expertise and authority, first responders are in a unique position to diminish the immediate traumatic stress of the survivors and witnesses whom they encounter" (p. 399). Teachers are increasingly being asked to perform this role with their students without adequate specialized training. Even with the necessary specialized training, teachers should not be first responders. The role of teachers is to educate children and to help them flourish in life. Even with adequate training in first response, teachers should not be in the role of protecting students' lives or taking students' lives. When put in the role of a first responder, teachers are asked to protect their students while also being willing to harm their students if necessary. The role of the first responder also assumes that the first responder was not part of the initial trauma. As teachers experience the trauma of school violence alongside their students, they cannot, by definition, be first responders. They experienced the trauma, and they are not responding to the people who experienced the trauma. If the role of a first responder is "addressing survivors and witnesses supportively and clearly, providing clear information about the status of the situation, developing safety plans, and helping traumatized survivors and witnesses to access trauma-informed professional services or peer support" (Ko et al., 2008, p. 399), then teachers experiencing school violence cannot fulfill this role. They are included with the survivors and witnesses and need first

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responders to attend to their needs. Even if teachers wanted to be first responders, the fact that they are experiencing the trauma precludes them from this role.

Since the shooting at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, there has been a transformation in how schools view and respond to school violence. While violence in schools is not new, the acceptance of school violence as routine and inexorable seems to be the norm as schools continue to use ineffective lockdown drills and zero-tolerance policies (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2021c; Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Knesting, 2001), and the media continue to blame teachers and administrators for not preventing school shootings by accusing them of not addressing bullying or not locking the doors of their classrooms (Hong et al., 2011; NPR et al., 2022). While bullying is insidious, and locked doors do provide more security, these two things in themselves do not cause children to be shot in schools. Before the Columbine shooting, research on school violence recommended the removal of handguns as a way to prevent school violence (Kopka, 1997). However, today, many schools discuss training and arming teachers, which is proven to be ineffective and unsafe (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2019). Teachers now view their students as potential threats while also seeing them as the people they need to protect, which shifts the focus from teaching to safety and control (Noguera, 1995). While not explicitly stated as a teacher role, many teachers feel the burden of physically protecting their students and being willing to sacrifice their own lives to protect their students or take the life of a student, "mentally preparing oneself to protect students 'at all costs'" (Stevens et al., 2019, p. 601). Teachers "regularly view their peers from across the nation responding to school shooting events and offering support to traumatized students or engage in such activities themselves" (Stevens et al., 2019, p. 603), and policies and practices need to change to keep teachers from needing to be first responders.

History of the Problem: A Brief Look at School Violence

While overall school violence has decreased since the 1980s, new forms of vandalism and performance art are entering US schools as a form of violence. School shootings are at an all-time high. However, violence in schools and students bringing weapons to school are not new phenomena. Historical accounts detail all types of violence committed by students and teachers in schools. Midlarsky and Klain (2006) cite many examples of violence in Europe in the 17th century. They comment:

> School violence appeared to be particularly widespread during periods wherein education became compulsory for previously unschooled students. Neither the students nor their teachers had any positive attachment to one another nor to the schools. Disciplinary problems were rampant

> and were addressed through corporal punishment. In contrast to the opinion that leniency leads to chaos, the harsh discipline applied in earlier times led, quite literally, to bloodshed.
>
> (p. 40)

When schools became places of compulsory attendance and coercion, violence increased. The violence in schools is a reflection of the violence in the larger society. In colonial American schools, "Even with the focus on discipline and values, school violence was present in the colonies. This violence may have been provoked, at least in part, by the environment in the larger community-which was chaotic and volatile" (Midlarsky & Klain, 2006, p. 41). Schools are microcosms of the larger society, and the violence in schools reflects the violence in the culture surrounding them.

Midlarsky and Klain (2006) explain that in the 1960s, the term "school violence" was coined to talk about the increasing violence in schools in that specific period. An increase in student population, racism, civil rights conflict, and the Vietnam War were some larger societal concerns of the day that seeped into the schools, fueling violence (Midlarsky & Klain, 2006). The first recorded case of random school violence was in 1966 at the University of Texas when a student shot and killed students and teachers from the library tower. A total of 13 people died, and an additional 31 were injured (Midlarsky & Klain, 2006). But Madfis (2016) contends that the term "random" to describe multiple-victim school shootings is detrimental to preventing future rampage shootings. Claiming that school rampages could happen everywhere at any time, without discernible motive or patterns, with all people being equally likely to be victims or perpetrators "distorts the meaning and magnitude of these horrendous crimes" (Madfis, 2016, p. 31) while also allowing the media and policymakers to claim not much can be done to avert them due to their "randomness."

One way that the US government attempted to prevent school shootings was the 1990 aspirational goal that "By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol, and offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning" (One Hundred Third Congress of the United States of America, 1994). The passing of the federal legislation called the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994 required schools to expel any student who brought a firearm to school for one year or lose all of their federal funding. The policy has been expanded since the shooting at Columbine High School in 1999 to include drug possession, disrespect, and a myriad of other infractions.

All public schools receiving federal funding have a gun control policy. The gun control policy and subsequent strategies of the policy have been implemented in all states of the United States to varying degrees of fidelity to the program's intentions.

Despite this law, there have been many school shootings since its passing, including some in the late 1990s right before the Columbine shooting in Pearl, Mississippi (1997), West Paducah, Kentucky (1997), and Springfield, Oregon (1998). The Columbine shooting on April 20, 1999, fundamentally changed how the world viewed school shootings because the media coverage gave the world a chance to actually "view" the devastating event in real time. Despite the outrage expressed by many in the United States and around the world, school shootings continue with increased frequency. Since starting writing this book, the Oxford High School shooting occurred on November 30, 2021, in Detroit, Michigan, the Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde, Texas happened on May 25, 2022, the Covenant School shooting in Nashville, Tennessee was on March 27, 2023, and the Abundant Life Christian School shooting in Madison, Wisconsin on December 16, 2024. If the pattern holds, more will occur before this book is published.

The rhetoric surrounding school shootings has mainly been dictated by the media, politicians, and the National Rifle Association of America (NRA). The rhetoric keeps the United States stuck in the same debates and a lack of progress on gun reform and preventing school shootings. Secret tapes from the NRA were leaked to the media during this study. The tapes reflect how the conversation surrounding school shootings has been shaped over the past 20 years. The tapes revealed conversations about the upcoming NRA annual convention that was to be held a few days after the Columbine shooting in 1999 in Denver, Colorado, as leadership agonized over how to respond so that they did not appear weak or at fault. The National Public Radio (NPR) released the tapes and script of the conversations, which reveal the NRA's concern with their image, loss of money if the convention did not go forward, and being blamed for the deaths if they apologized or gave any money to families of the victims of the Columbine shooting. One particularly insightful comment was made by NRA lobbyist Jim Baker during the conference call:

> "At that same period where they're going to be burying these children, we're going to be having media … trying to run through the exhibit hall, looking at kids fondling firearms, which is going to be a horrible, horrible, horrible juxtaposition."
>
> (National Public Radio [NPR] & Mak, 2021)

The public message given at the annual conference that year continues to be the response the NRA has after each school shooting, "The national media is not to be trusted, and any conversation about guns and the NRA after mass shootings is an untoward politicization of the issue" (NPR & Mak, 2021). Just days after the devastating loss of life in Uvalde, Texas, when elementary school children and teachers were killed in their school, the

NRA went forward with a big gun show in Houston, Texas. Voice of America and the Associated Press (2022) reported that former NRA board member, Rocky Marshall, stated that the Uvalde shooting "'does put the meeting in a bad light,' that's not a reason to cancel it. Marshall said gun-rights advocates and opponents can perhaps reduce gun violence if they focus on factors such as mental illness or school security." The continued blame for school shootings on the lack of mental health services and adequate school security, instead of access to firearms, is a major contributor to the increase in school shootings.

While school violence and school shootings are not new, their increased frequency is alarming. The control of the discussion by the media, politicians, and the NRA keeps the conversation stuck with very little, if any, progress in preventing school shootings. This book attempts to widen the conversation and allow for the voices of school shooting survivors to add to the conversation.

Current School Shooting Prevention Strategies are Ineffective: The Era of Zero-Tolerance Policies

Watching Columbine High School students flee from their school, escaping bullets and bombs on April 20, 1999, shocked the nation and the world. But after more than two decades of policies and practices intended to decrease school shootings, there are more school shootings than ever before. We have shifted from disbelief and determination to never let it happen again to accept and minimize fatalities when the next school shooting occurs. While researchers and politicians tell us that our children are more likely to die from guns outside of school than inside of school, this data is not reassuring but rather points to the acceptance of violence as part of the American psyche and culture, which is permeating our school climate as well. While many people remember where they were when they heard about the shooting at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, due to the increasing occurrences of these statistically rare events, the details of the numerous rampage shootings leave us asking, "Which shooting? Where was that one?" Although school violence has been on a downward trend since the 1990s, school shootings continue to increase. The period between August 1 and December 31, 2021, had the most school shootings since Everytown for Gun Safety began keeping data in 2013 (Fung, 2022). The United States must address this growing problem and the way that it affects our students and teachers. Attempts to address school shootings through zero-tolerance policies, target hardening of school buildings, and active shooter drills have not reduced the frequency, and the number of school shootings is increasing.

While school shootings are not the pandemic that the media might lead us to believe, they are increasing, and the school climate surrounding active

shooters has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. The role of the media in covering the Columbine shooting fueled the moral panic that ensued (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Madfis, 2015; Muschert, 2007), declaring a "devil" or one who does evil to blame for the breakdown of social order (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Cohen, 2002; Madfis, 2015; Muschert, 2007). This moral panic led to an overrepresentation of school shootings in the media, causing alarm and fear at a disproportionate rate to the statistical risk (Borum et al., 2010; Burns & Crawford, 1999; Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Furlong et al., 2004; Muschert, 2007). The many copycat events at schools since the Columbine incident have changed how school shootings are covered today, not giving as much coverage time and typically not naming the shooters. But the commonality with which school shootings are covered today is also an indication of their acceptance in the American understanding of our schools and ourselves as a gun nation, regardless of their statistical rarity.

While statistically rare, school shootings have shaped an entire generation of students in US schools and the ways that schools build school climate and school culture. Generation Z, otherwise known as Zoomers, born between the years of mid-1990s to early 2010s, are also called the School Shooting Generation. They learned how to do active shooter drills "before they knew what guns were" as expressed by Maciel (2021) in a college newspaper opinion piece:

> I was never alive to see a time before active shooter drills were set in place. We were trained to hide from a gun before we even knew what the object was. My generation was exposed to the idea of death so early on because we needed to understand the true harm of a gun for our own safety. We had to learn quickly that at any moment someone could walk into our school, a place we were told was our "safe space" from home, and hurt any one of us because it was that easy for someone to get a gun.

The data on active shooter drills and lockdown drills are controversial, with the lack of consistent use of the terms and procedures for these drills complicating the issue. This is important for schools to know because, along with zero-tolerance disciplinary policies and target hardening of their buildings, it is their main defense against school violence. Schildkraut et al. (2024) define "lockdown drills" as an opportunity to practice a procedure of five standardized steps for any immediate threat or danger, which could include an active shooter. They define "active shooter drills" as practicing for one specific threat, an armed assailant actively killing or attempting to kill people in a specific place (Schildkraut et al., 2024). Everytown for Gun Safety (2021c) states: "Perhaps more troublesome than the current lack of scientific consensus on active shooter drills is the lack of research on long-term consequences and wider community impacts like trauma and

mental and physical health impairments." Yet, 40 out of 50 US states require students and teachers to participate in active shooter drills. "In the absence of any conclusive evidence on drills' effectiveness at ensuring safety during actual active shooter incidents" and "assess whether the potential but unproven benefits of these drills outweigh their known collateral consequences to school communities' mental health and wellbeing" (Everytown for Gun Safety, n.d.). Schildkraut et al. (2024)'s research concludes that lockdown drills used in real mass shooting events have a "protective function" and that, done properly, lockdown drills can provide opportunities to achieve skill mastery without causing excessive harm. These studies show the continued need for research on the types of drills that are used in school, as far as their effectiveness at their intended outcomes, as well as the emotional and psychological effects on the participants. The rhetoric surrounding school shootings seems to focus on response rather than prevention of future shootings, where the inevitability of a body count is assumed to be part of the cost of public education. While private schools are not immune to school shootings, the data show that students attending private schools are statistically much less likely to experience a school shooting (Cato Institute, 2018). Controlling for factors such as location, the racial makeup of student and teacher populations, and school size, private schools experience a more positive school culture and, according to data from the Cato Institute (2018), "are significantly less likely than public schools to experience problems such as student fighting, bullying, and, perhaps most importantly, weapon possession." As schools make decisions about school safety policies and procedures, they need to have access to and use this type of data about the importance of school culture when preventing school shootings.

After the Columbine High School shooting on April 20, 1999, the nation asked, "Why did this happen?" "How could it have happened here?" The response from the country was disbelief and grief. After the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, on February 14, 2018, the students responded with marches and led a movement, and the youth asked, "Why haven't we stopped this?" Students were no longer surprised to experience a school shooting and expected that it might happen to them.

Phrases and slogans and marches, and foundations have followed all school shootings that have occurred since 1999, but the number of school shootings continues to rise. The student survivors of the Parkland shooting started a student movement. They rallied behind the slogan #Enough as if the body count would finally make a difference in reforming gun policy. Emma Gonzalez survived the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, where 17 people were killed. Gonzalez gave a speech a few days after the shooting, expressing a shift in the response of students to school shootings since the shooting at Columbine. She asserted:

> The people in the government who were voted into power are lying to us. And us kids seem to be the only ones who notice and our parents to call BS. Companies trying to make caricatures of the teenagers these days, saying that all we are self-involved and trend-obsessed and they hush us into submission when our message doesn't reach the ears of the nation, we are prepared to call BS. Politicians who sit in their gilded House and Senate seats funded by the NRA telling us nothing could have been done to prevent this, we call BS. They say tougher guns laws do not decrease gun violence. We call BS. They say a good guy with a gun stops a bad guy with a gun. We call BS. They say guns are just tools like knives and are as dangerous as cars. We call BS. They say no laws could have prevented the hundreds of senseless tragedies that have occurred. We call BS. That us kids don't know what we're talking about, that we're too young to understand how the government works. We call BS.
>
> (Madfis, 2020, p. 145)

As a nation, the United States shifted from being shocked that it could happen even in quiet suburban towns to preparing all students and teachers for what to do when it happens the next time. This shift in thinking and training affects the culture of our schools, which is intricately linked to the safety of our schools. There is no longer a discussion about the removal of handguns as a way to prevent school violence, as was the case in 1997 when Kopka published *School Violence: A Reference Handbook*. Instead, many schools train and arm teachers to take down a future perpetrator (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2022), who is likely to be a student or former student (Densley, 2019; Hong et al., 2011; Leary et al., 2003; Vossekuil et al., 2004). Data show that this is unsafe, ineffective, and detrimental to the climate and safety of our schools (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2019).

Despite research showing that the current safety policies of many schools are unsafe and ineffective, many school districts continue to use them. Overpolicing, zero-tolerance policies, surveillance cameras, arming teachers, profiling students, and active shooter drills are not working to prevent school violence, and they are not promoting positive school climates necessary to make schools safer (Altheide, 2009; Borum et al., 2010; Everytown for Gun Safety, 2021b; Perlstein, 2000; Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Vossekuil et al., 2004; Warnick & Kapa, 2019). More research is needed to make our schools safer and to offer a better solution than preparing our students and teachers for the next time a school shooting occurs. Instead of focusing on responding to school shootings with buildings that resemble prisons and drills that inflict fear and trauma, some practices and policies offer hope for school shooting prevention through the use of threat assessment teams and RPs based on relationships of trust among students, teachers, and staff where all people flourish.

A Pandemic Exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic created stress and chaos for everyone worldwide, which led to specific school challenges. Based on the historical patterns of violence in schools that reflect society at large, it is not unexpected that school violence increased during the pandemic. The situation in the world was chaotic and unclear. The stability and normalcy that schools typically provide were interrupted and altered. As the United States endured the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020, mental health and social-emotional learning (SEL) were highlighted as areas to address. During remote learning, children and teachers faced the challenge and stress of remote learning, masked in-person learning, quarantine periods, and the constant need to be flexible.

One side effect of the strain was an increase in school violence when students returned to school. As children were exposed to new stress and increased levels of gun violence, schools need to reconsider implementing lockdown drills, "In the absence of any conclusive evidence on drills' effectiveness at ensuring safety during actual active shooter incidents" and "assess whether the potential but unproven benefits of these drills outweigh their known collateral consequences to school communities' mental health and wellbeing" (Everytown for Gun Safety, n.d.). As school and home routines were less predictable and children had easier access to guns, school shootings increased. Other factors that help prevent school violence, like after-school programs and sports, were not offered during this period, which further highlights that schools are more than just the traditional place for learning math and reading. Schools provide societal stability, mental and physical health, food security, and connection to caring adults (Brooks, 2022). As schools return to normalcy, policies and practices need to change to ensure that school shootings do not become a more regular part of the normal educational experience of US students.

In the United States, while school violence has decreased overall, school shootings are at an all-time high. Since the shooting at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, policies and practices have been put in place hoping to keep this terrible event from ever happening again.

But the current policies and practices are failing. Everytown for Gun Safety is an organization and a movement working to prevent school violence. Since it began keeping data in 2013, the period between August 1 and December 31, 2021, had the most school shootings (Fung, 2022). And in 2019–2020, despite many school closures due to the coronavirus pandemic, "there were a total of 75 school shootings with casualties, including 27 school shootings with deaths and 48 school shootings with injuries only" (Irwin et al., 2020, p. 3). This was the same total number of school shootings in the 2018–2019 school year when schools were open and operating as usual. Despite efforts to prevent school shootings, they are still increasing.

Although school shootings are still occurring, some policies and practices put in place to address them are having a positive effect on other aspects of schooling. According to Irwin et al. (2020) certain categories of school violence and criminalization have decreased over the past decade from 2009 to 2019, as reported by students: criminal victimization, being bullied, being called hate-related words, seeing hate-related graffiti, observing a gang presence, or being involved in a physical fight on school property. In this same period, the general trend of school shootings has been on the rise, including shootings where only injuries occurred and those where there were fatalities. These data show that new policies and practices must specifically address how to prevent school violence.

School Safety Policies Disproportionally Affect Students of Color

The policies and practices put in place to manage school shootings are not focused on violence prevention and creating a positive learning environment, but rather on responding to school violence. Armed School Resource Officers (SROs), metal detectors, surveillance cameras, lockdown drills, and zero-tolerance disciplinary policies assume that another school shooting will happen, and schools and teachers should mitigate the damage inflicted by the shooter. Research shows that these policies have not only failed at preventing school shootings but they also disproportionately affect students of Color (Borum et al., 2010; Buckmaster, 2016; Perlstein, 2000; Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Warnick & Kapa, 2019). The goal of school safety should be to ensure that all students are safe at school and to prevent students from wanting to harm each other or themselves in the first place (Muschert & Madfis, 2014).

Schools want to provide safe learning environments for their students and teachers. The focus needs to shift to the prevention of school shootings and the promotion of positive learning environments instead of responding to a crisis event. Instead of spending time and resources arming teachers and practicing lockdown drills, schools need to invest in threat assessment teams and use RPs to build relationships of trust that enable these teams to be effective at preventing school shootings. As the pandemic disrupted relationships in schools and as more teachers are considering leaving the profession or retiring, "there are now and will continue to be fewer adults connected to students who can see warning signs that a child may be heading toward violent behavior" due to teacher burnout and lack of staff (Brooks, 2022). At the same time, it is essential to note that the complex nature of school shootings means that schools have limited control over preventing school shootings as long as the US government continues to allow easy access to guns. This book documents the experiences of Columbine survivors who went on to be teachers and how they built relationships of trust with their students to make recommendations on preventing school shootings.

Significance of the Problem: The Importance of a Positive School Climate in School Violence Prevention and the Impact School Shootings are Having on the School Climate

Schools in the United States are tasked with educating children and also keeping them physically safe. This task has grown more difficult since the shooting at Columbine in 1999, which was one of the first heavily publicized school shootings. Teachers are now expected to keep students safe during an active shooting and provide protection and safety against gun violence in schools. The United States has not made sweeping gun reforms that will prevent future school shootings. So, administrators are left to do the best they can to keep their students and staff safe. Many current school safety policies and procedures are either ineffective at preventing school violence or further increase the likelihood of school violence occurring through a negative school climate (Borum et al., 2010; Buckmaster, 2016; Perlstein, 2000; Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Warnick & Kapa, 2019). Schools continue to try these unproven tactics in an attempt to stop the increasing school violence or to mitigate its effects when school violence does occur. Many schools have responded to school violence with increased punitive disciplinary policies, surveillance, and security measures, but "These solutions, however, lack empirical evidence confirming their preventative purpose and amount to short-sighted efforts to alleviate the anxieties of parents, faculty, and students" (Madfis, 2020, p. 104). Instead of focusing on preventing school violence, many schools continue to spend money and time investing in ineffective training and equipment going as far as issuing poop buckets to classrooms. A poop bucket is a bucket that a teacher keeps in their room in case they need to be locked in their room for an extended period of time. It is for teachers and students to urinate and poop in like a toilet.

> School districts are apparently seeing the futility of waiting for the government to come up with a way to help prevent or stop the murdering of children with firearms while they are at school. It is simpler to deliver portable poop buckets to teachers.
>
> (Smith, 2020)

Along with the idea of arming teachers, it makes more sense in American gun culture to prepare teachers and students for the next school shooting instead of investing in proven measures that prevent school violence. Instead of alleviating anxieties about school violence, schools should address the underlying causes of school violence and implement proven practices and policies to prevent more school shootings.

Research has shown that school climate is linked to student achievement and teaching and learning (Cohen et al., 2009), and research is now revealing

the importance of a positive school climate in school violence prevention (Borum et al., 2010; Buckmaster, 2016; Cohen et al., 2009; Skiba, 2014). Healthy and trusting relationships are at the foundation of a positive school climate. Many teachers desire to build positive relationships with their students, and many teachers have successfully built trusting relationships with students. However, the lack of comprehensive training for teachers in how to build relationships using proven frameworks leaves schools open to continued school violence.

The research shows that threat assessment teams are one of the few proven ways to prevent school shootings (Madfis, 2020; Warnick & Kapa, 2019), but there is a gap in the literature on how schools can best support teachers in building relationships of trust necessary for threat assessment teams to be effective at thwarting school violence. This study documents the experience of Columbine shooting survivors who went on to become teachers and how they build relationships of trust and care with their students. While there is a growing body of research on school shootings, very rarely does it include the voices of school shooting survivors who are teachers. This study provides a unique perspective from the survivors of the Columbine school shooting as they understand their trauma and how they used that experience to build trusting relationships with their students as an act of future school shooting prevention.

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4 What Has Already Been Done to Prevent School Shootings, and Why is it Ineffective?

Since the shooting at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, US school administrators' responses to school violence have fundamentally changed. Children can no longer tease each other in the hallways or on the playground or write violent stories without teachers or school officials wondering if another "Columbine" might happen in the near future. While violence at school has been present as long as we have recorded history, a fundamental shift in reactions to school violence occurred after the national unfolding of the horrendous events on April 20, 1999, at Columbine High School. As teachers and school officials feel the burden to prevent future school shootings, a new field of research studying the factors surrounding school shootings has emerged. Factors such as the complexity of the social ecology in which students live, accessibility to guns, and the acceptability in the United States to use violence to solve conflict, the use of punitive and zero-tolerance disciplinary strategies known to be disproportionately administered and correlated with a negative school environment, the continued use of social control and power over students in educational institutions, and the lack of training and support for teachers in building and maintaining quality relationships of trust with students are all suggested as risk factors possibly leading to school violence.

Through this chapter, I discuss the risk factors presented in the literature about school shootings. I will begin with school climate and the perception of school violence and school violence prevention preceding the Columbine shooting, move on to the moral panic immediately following the Columbine shooting and subsequent measures put in place to prevent future school shootings as researchers sought to discover causes and who was to blame, continue with the ideas of social control, symbolic violence, delinquency, crime, discipline, and shame as they pertain to school violence, and then address how schools are now simultaneously protecting and fearing children and youth.

The climate of a school is a complex system of integrated ecologies of relationships that affect everything related to the school, including the prevention of violence. Cohen et al. (2009) defined school climate as how a

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school operates and the character of the school life founded on people's experience of the character of the school life based on the norms, values, relationships, goals, teaching and learning implementation, and organizational structures of the school (p. 182). School safety and school climate are related and linked because these variables affect one another. To achieve a positive school climate, students must feel safe. And to feel safe, schools need a positive school climate. Communities must address how students and teachers perceive their safety at school using empirically sound measures of school climate, effective policies concerning discipline, and teacher education to ensure a healthier school climate (Furlong et al., 2004; Skiba, 2014). Student- and classroom-level factors have a greater impact on student perceptions of school climate than school-level factors. In Koth et al.'s (2008) study of fifth-grade students, children were affected by disruptive peers, and it negatively affected their view of classroom climate. The grouping of students is important for classroom and school climate because children with deviant or aggressive behaviors can influence their peers, and the behavior can become socially accepted, shifting the social norms (Koth et al., 2008). But the use of exclusionary discipline intended to make a school safer by removing the potential threat has been shown to actually increase the likelihood of violence (Buckmaster, 2016; Skiba, 2014). Confirming this statement, Skiba (2014) declared, "No data exist to show that out-of-school suspensions and expulsions reduce disruption or improve school climate. If anything, disciplinary removal appears to have negative effects on student outcomes and the learning climate" (p. 30). To create a more positive school environment, Cohen et al. (2009) have noted that four areas need to be addressed: "safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the (external) environment" (p. 182). This literature review will address the safety and relationship aspects of school climate as it pertains to the prevention of school violence.

School Violence Perceptions in the United States in the 1990s

While incidents of school violence were decreasing in the United States in the 1990s, perceptions of schools as unsafe places continued to increase even before the era of the rampage school shootings in the late 1990s. School violence was seen as mostly occurring in urban schools. According to Kopka (1997), physical acts of violence are easier to quantify and were the basis for the statistics in her book, but the definition of violence encompasses more than just physical acts. It can also be verbal or visual acts with the intention of harming or impeding someone's civil rights (p. 1). Data on school violence were not kept or reported in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, and much of the data on school violence in the 1990s came from surveys completed by teachers and students (Kopka, 1997). While it is important to hear from students and teachers about their school climate and school

culture, their feelings about violence in the 1990s did not prove that youth violence was on the rise. Yell and Rozalski (2000) based their findings on one such survey reporting on students' fear of violence at school declaring,

> Violence in American society has reached epidemic proportions. Especially troubling is the increasing violence among young people, with the predictable spillover of effects into the public schools. In fact, violence has become a significant aspect of the public school experience in America. (p. 187)

Despite people believing that schools were dangerous places, research has shown that youth violence was decreasing (Skiba, 2014; Warnick et al., 2015). Yet, as overall school violence decreased and the risk of dying at school continued being much less likely than outside of school (Warnick & Kapa, 2019), a new phenomenon of school violence was increasing in the 1990s. Although schools were relatively safe compared to broader society, public perception of school violence was exacerbated, and this only increased with the rampage school shootings in the late 1990s.

School Violence Prevention Before the Columbine Shooting: Quantifiable Disciplinary Measures

Although schools were places of relative safety in the 1990s, there were already curricula and policies in place to prevent school violence. At the time of Kopka's 1997 book, *School Violence: A Reference Handbook*, violence was thought to be a learned behavior, and most school violence prevention programs were based on curricula. Some curricula in use in the 1990s included peer mentoring, character education, and conflict resolution skills aimed at preventing school violence (Noguera, 1995). In Colonial America, in the 17th and 18th centuries, the goal of education was based on religion, with teachers educating children in the accepted values and morals of the time (Midlarsky & Klain, 2006). However, in the 1990s, character education was controversial for both conservative and liberal opponents, as many believed that morals should be taught at home (Kopka, 1997). Morals and character education are also hard to quantify, and school districts felt the pressure to provide results that school violence was decreasing (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Burdened with the task of keeping schools safe and decreasing school violence, school leaders tended to use quantifiable data to prove their success or attempted to hide information on violent incidents in school, fearing adverse publicity (Noguera, 1995). The types of prevention that are easily quantifiable are disciplinary measures such as suspensions and expulsions (Madfis, 2015; Warnick & Kapa, 2019), and more schools adopted and expanded zero-tolerance policies criminalizing even minor infractions with

the hope of preventing future school violence (Madfis, 2015; Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Faced with the difficult task of providing safety and proving that their measures worked, administrators adopted visible measures and recognizable tactics. As schools needed more evidence of the effectiveness of their school violence prevention, they moved toward punitive and zero-tolerance policies that provided numerical data on suspensions and expulsions while also continuing to use curricula aimed at teaching behaviors that would decrease violence. But school shootings changed the conversation about school violence into a moral panic, making fear the driving factor in school violence policies.

School Violence Prevention After the Columbine Shooting: Moral Panic, Blame, and Zero Tolerance Policies

Moral Panic

During the 1990s, school shootings captured the attention of many Americans due to the disproportionate time and attention given to them by the media, creating a new moral panic around school shootings. The April 20, 1999, shooting at Columbine High School unfolded on live national television, leading many parents, students, and teachers to fear a similar incident occurring at their school (Altheide, 2009; Borum et al., 2010; Burns & Crawford, 1999; Madfis, 2015). The subsequent framing of this particular school shooting as the breakdown of societal order or an act of terrorism led to a moral panic that continues to create fear for school personnel, parents, students, and the general public (Altheide, 2009; Madfis, 2015; Muschert, 2007; Skiba, 2014; Warnick & Kapa, 2019). Moral panic describes a phenomenon that gains attention in the media disproportionate to the occurrence of the event with the intention of labeling a "devil" or evildoer responsible for the breakdown of social order (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Cohen, 2002; Madfis, 2015; Muschert, 2007). In times of crisis, people look for explanations and people to blame. Cohen (2002) is credited as one of the first to use the term "moral panic" in his 1972 book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*:

> Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.
>
> (p. 1)

As the media plastered images of youth fleeing from the building of Columbine High School and reframed the story, making it a month-long top news story (Chyi & McCombs, 2004), moral panic gripped the nation and the world as youth were at the same time seen as the victims and the evildoers. While a moral panic exaggerates a problem that is occurring in society, the school shooting narrative overlooked the data from the social sciences reporting a relatively stable rate of school violence in the 1990s (Noguera, 1995; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). School violence was on a downward trend, but the increased media attention to highly publicized school shootings in the 1990s and early 2000s led to the belief that school shootings were a new phenomenon and an increasing social problem (Borum et al., 2010; Burns & Crawford, 1999; Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Furlong et al., 2004; Muschert, 2007). While school shootings were occurring more frequently in the 21st century (Madfis, 2020), there is debate among the media and academics as to how common they are (Madfis, 2020). These dichotomous sources of information about school shootings create an environment for a moral panic. This happens with school shootings due to media reports differing from social science reports and the diversity of the incidents included in this one topic (Muschert, 2007). The framing of the Columbine High School shooting into a moral panic distracted from the fact that school violence was on a decline and from the work of community healing and effective means to prevent future school shootings. Instead, people responded to the need to find and eliminate the evildoers through the use of zero-tolerance policies and the surveillance of all youth.

Blame

Immediately following the shooting at Columbine High School, people searched for answers to try and make sense of what happened, to understand what caused the violence, and to find someone to blame and hold accountable for the senseless act. The media's framing of the event as a moral panic led to various theories and risk factors being studied directly following the shooting as the frame changed from an individual frame to a community frame and then to a societal frame, focusing the story on broader societal issues such as gun control (Chyi & McCombs, 2004). Researchers and media personnel posited theories about what led to the Columbine shooting and subsequent school shootings, including bullying, homophobia, rejection, access to and fascination with firearms, mental illness, violent video games, belonging to the Trenchcoat Mafia, and considering or attempting suicide (Cohen, 2002; Hong et al., 2011; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Leary et al., 2003; Lickel et al., 2003; Vossekuil et al., 2004). In the search for causes for the Columbine shooting, other researchers, and media attention turned to who was to blame for the horrendous event assigning fault to the parents of the

shooters, the friends of the shooters, deviant youth culture, homogenic masculinity, and bullying (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Hong et al., 2011; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Lickel et al., 2003). But correlation does not indicate causation, and the single commonality in all school shootings is access to firearms (Muschert, 2007), see Appendix C. Despite this evidence, the US government is not currently on the pathway to limiting access to guns, in contrast to some other developed nations that have enforced stricter gun laws in response to gun violence (Masters, 2021). When Kopka (1997) published *School Violence: A Reference Handbook* prior to the Columbine shooting, the public health community determined that the best way to prevent school violence was by banning possessing, manufacturing, and selling handguns. Current research on school shootings does not view the removal of guns as a realistic way to prevent school shootings (Muschert, 2007), leaving schools and communities to address other causes and risk factors associated with school shootings. Muschert (2007) contends that researchers' focus "on a single causal dynamic has contributed to the lack of integration in the field" ignoring the "constellation of contributing causes" of school shootings "none of which is sufficient in itself to explain a shooting" (p. 68).

Until all guns can be removed from the equation, furthering the field of school shooting research requires schools, communities, and policies to address schools as a complex set of relationships and make safety decisions based on a comprehensive understanding of what leads to school shootings. Instead of looking for people, institutions, or groups to blame for school shootings after they have occurred, choosing to be collectively responsible for the care of our children as a society may help with preventing school violence.

Zero-Tolerance Policies

The moral panic surrounding school shootings led the way for increased zero-tolerance policies to prevent future school shootings through punitive disciplinary policies that increasingly criminalize student behaviors and attitudes. Madfis (2015) asserted that the media's disproportionate coverage of school rampages was used to increase the social control schools already exerted, increasing the criminalization and security measures in schools. Grappling for easy solutions to complex problems and proof that they were protecting students and staff, school leaders and politicians increasingly utilized punitive zero-tolerance disciplinary strategies known to be disproportionately administered and correlated with a negative school environment (Borum et al., 2010; Perlstein, 2000; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Warnick & Kapa, 2019). Just as social science data showed that school violence was on the decline in the 1990s (Borum et al., 2010; Kopka, 1997; Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Knesting, 2001), it also indicated that zero-tolerance policies were

ineffective at deterring school shootings and likely added to a negative school climate, one of the risk factors for school shootings (Borum et al., 2010; Buckmaster, 2016; Skiba, 2014). Zero tolerance was adopted by schools even though it started as a punishment for drug use among Navy soldiers and was controversial from the start (Skiba, 2014). The immediate response of schools across the nation, including Columbine, was to enforce stricter policies to deter future school shootings (Artello et al., 2015; Buckmaster, 2016; Muschert et al., 2014). SROs, metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and other technologies were tangible ways that schools could demonstrate how they were making schools safer and evidence to stakeholders that potentially dangerous youth would not be able to replicate the Columbine shooting (Hong et al., 2011; Madfis, 2015; Perlstein, 2000). But these policies and practices of target hardening were not effective in deterring future violence and were disproportionately applied to urban schools and those with minority students even though rampage school shootings predominately occurred in rural and suburban schools perpetrated by White students (Gregory et al., 2014; Noguera, 1995; Skiba, 2014; Warnick & Kapa, 2019). This exacerbated the already known problem in education of disproportionality in disciplinary actions based on ethnicity (Skiba, 2014; Williams et al., 2020a, 2020b; Yeager et al., 2017). School officials increasingly saw their role as one of protectors and defenders of youth while also viewing youth as potential threats (Altheide, 2009; Madfis, 2015; Perlstein, 2000). Exclusionary punishments increased as schools removed "potential threats" from the classroom. Feeling the burden of protecting students, Perlstein (2000) explained that administrators at Columbine and other schools were tasked with convincing students that schools were safe despite factors that were not controllable, such as easy access to guns. Yet, as Perlstein (2000) has been saying for more than 20 years, tolerance cannot be achieved through zero tolerance. This idea is echoed by Skiba (2014) when he declared, "We can no longer afford simply to throw away those who transgress in our schools, especially when such exclusions continue to disproportionately impact those who have been marginalized throughout our history" (Skiba, 2014, p. 32). Previous researchers have shown for decades that zero-tolerance and exclusionary practices do not deter future school violence, and it is incompatible to base a school discipline policy around zero tolerance and expect it to create a school climate of tolerance.

Since US gun policies continue to make access to weapons easy, schools continue to need alternative means of mitigating the increasing number of school shootings occurring around the country. Addressing school violence requires a holistic approach on the macro-ecological level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hong et al., 2011). Preventing school violence is not enough. We must figure out why children want to kill each other in the first place (Muschert & Madfis, 2014) and then create a school climate where this is less likely.

Why Schools?: Social Control and Symbolic Violence, Delinquency and Crime, Discipline and Shame, Protecting and Fearing Youth

Social Control and Symbolic Violence

To further understand the complex nature of school shootings, one must understand public education in the United States as an institution of social control that continues in the educational system today, creating symbolic school violence that can precede physical school violence. Noguera (1995) outlined the history of public education, commenting that humanitarian terms were used to describe educational goals, but schools also believed they needed to control student behavior. The dual understanding of schools as places offering benevolence to children while also seeing the children as threats gave schools the responsibility for increasingly viewing the institution as responsible for raising urban children who were seen as more of a threat (Noguera, 1995). The school as an institution of social control tries to fight school violence through force, especially in schools with minority and poor students, with the intention of creating compliant, obedient citizens (Madfis, 2015; Noguera, 1995). While this occurred before the Columbine shooting, it greatly increased after the incident, expanding to rural and suburban schools, as schools increased surveillance and criminalization of schools, creating prison-like environments with no evidence of the effectiveness of deterring violence (Borum et al., 2010; Madfis, 2015; Muschert, 2007). Different responses to school shootings have come out of fear of these horrendous but rare events. Tactics used to prevent school shootings that do not have empirical evidence to support their effectiveness are: the extension of the GFSA of 1994 to other infractions, zero tolerance, the Unsafe School Choice option for persistently dangerous schools, target hardening and security measures, and profiling students and looking for warning signs (Altheide, 2009; Borum et al., 2010; Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Vossekuil et al., 2004; Warnick & Kapa, 2019). While research has shown that overt violence in schools has decreased, Warnick et al. (2015) explained that the idea of microaggression and violence that exists in many environments is also unique to the school setting due to attendance being mandated through laws. The coercion is also more intense and invades all areas of a school where students are forced to complete assignments, take exams, sit in assigned seats, talk at specified times, and take care of bathroom necessities based on the teacher's time schedule (Warnick et al., 2015). When students perceive schools as places of violence perpetrated upon them, the idea of a school shooting comes in response to violence that is already occurring against students. Warnick et al. (2015) declared, "If we define violence as an exertion of force to change the environment, then schools are fundamentally places of violence" (p. 375). As the Columbine

shooting became linked to terrorism after the attacks on 9/11, social control increased even more in schools. Altheide (2009) contended that scant evidence shows that labeling school shootings as terrorism reduces school shootings. It has only led to increased social control in schools from external agencies that are always at war on terror, believing in taking action "before it is too late" despite not knowing what "it" is (Altheide, 2009, p. 1367). To better understand school shootings, this perspective of schools exerting violence on students must be further addressed by researchers.

Delinquency and Crime

When addressing school violence, the ideas of delinquency and crime must be discussed. The field of criminology has divergent views on what produces deviance and criminality, with some saying it is part of society and others saying it is based on choice and learned behavior (Braithwaite, 1989). Cohen (2002) explained that the idea of deviance has also changed, shifting from a study of crime, delinquency, and social behaviors that were authoritative and unquestionable and accepted by society to one that is skeptical. People now question the words deviant, dysfunctional, threatening, and dangerous. What is the behavior deviant from? Who decides what is a threat or dangerous? (Cohen, 2002). As schools add more behaviors to the list of what they have zero tolerance for, juveniles are being forced to conform to society's increasing expectations of them through the use of this public discipline policy listing the behaviors that are no longer tolerated (Burns & Crawford, 1999). Educators must look at what the goal is when addressing delinquency and how they are supporting students in learning behaviors that promote the values that lead to the successful development of children. Noddings (2012) declared, "A climate in which caring relations can flourish should be a goal for all teachers and educational policymakers. In such a climate, we can best meet individual needs, impart knowledge, and encourage the development of moral people" (p. 777). Further research needs to address the policies and procedures to promote school safety and prevent school violence based on definitions of delinquency and deviance, and how students are supported in developing behaviors that are socially accepted and developmentally appropriate.

Discipline and Shame

The use of discipline in schools to control students and get desired outcomes is an accepted practice in the US educational settings, at times utilizing shame as a way to influence student behavior. While practices and procedures have changed since the institutionalization of education, the basic understanding of schools as places that can inflict punishment on students

for acts of deviance persists (Madfis, 2020; Noguera, 1995; Warnick et al., 2015). As schools determine what behaviors to punish, they need to evaluate if the intention of the discipline is to stop a specific behavior in an individual student, deter other students from engaging in the same behavior, or help teach students socially agreed-upon norms of interacting and relating to others (Acosta et al., 2016; Cohen, 2002; Madfis, 2015; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Noguera, 1995). By focusing on controlling student behavior, Buckmaster (2016) contended that school policies limit students' opportunities to engage in critical thinking about their actions in terms other than the threat of being punished. Children are robbed of the moral formation that is necessary for their development as they think about how their actions affect themselves and others, which allows for internalizing values that schools want them to learn (Buckmaster, 2016). The role of shame in discipline and moral formation is controversial. Shame is defined by Sommer et al. (2020) as the discrepancy between how one is perceived by others and how one truly is stemming from seeing oneself as less than others. Marshall (2020) further describes shame, stating:

> In terms of origins, the capacity for shame in children precedes the development of the cognitive capacity for guilt. Consciousness of guilt requires the ability to evaluate one's own behaviour and modify it to conform to moral directives, an ability associated with the gradual acquisition of language. Shame, by contrast, is a more primitive physiological reaction to fluctuations in attachment bonds that does not involve reasoning about right and wrong.
>
> (pp. 121–122)

If shame is based on these attachment bonds, adults should use caution when relying on shaming to change behavior due to the caring nature of the teacher–student relationship (Noddings, 2012). Some school violence researchers include the use of shame as a microaggression of violence, something harmful occurring in institutional schooling (Warnick et al., 2015) while others validate the necessity of shame in developing a conscious and "persuading through social disapproval" (Braithwaite, 1989, p. 9).

According to Braithwaite (1989), a key distinction when considering the use of shame in school discipline is the idea of reintegrative versus disintegrative or stigmatizing shame. When students are labeled as deviant, troubled, and dangerous, they are stigmatized, excluded, and turned into a "class of outcasts" (Braithwaite, 1989, p. 55). When shame is stigmatizing, as it was for at least one of the Columbine shooters, it can be a risk for violence (Hong et al., 2011). When shame is not acknowledged, the individual feeling shame is not given the support they need, or feelings of isolation are reinforced, students may turn to violent strategies to eliminate their feelings of shame

(Sommer et al., 2020). Research shows a strong correlation between shame and eventual aggression (Sommer et al., 2020). For people who tend toward feelings of shame, punishment is more likely to incite rather than prevent future violence (Marshall, 2020). Marshall (2020) stated that guilt requires the ability to have empathetic imagination, while entrenched shame impedes empathy, cutting off the sense of responsibility to others, and increasing the feelings of anguish and belief that wrong is done to the one who actually committed the offense or caused harm. Students who experience exclusionary discipline practices may experience this stigmatizing shame with no ability to access the empathy necessary to show true remorse and be restored to the community. The belief with reintegrative shaming is that students who have done harm learn how their actions and behaviors affect the community from people who are of importance to them. According to Braithwaite (1989), if a person is isolated and rejected, the shame will not be of importance to them, whereas when shamed by someone of importance, the shaming is more effective at deterring unwanted behaviors. Expanding on Braithwaite's (1989) theory of reintegrative shaming, Masters (1997) connected it to RPs of Family Group Conferences (FGCs) and victim-offender mediations (VOMs). He described how the exhibition of the emotion shame during these meetings is more successful, as victims are more willing to forgive offenders after they have exhibited genuine shame. For schools to use shame as a disciplinary tool to help prevent school violence, students must have an opportunity to learn how their actions affected others, learn new ways of being with the group, have the support necessary to practice the new skills, and be welcomed back into the group.

But with the research showing the link between rampage shooters and feelings of ostracization and shame (Hong et al., 2011; Leary et al., 2003), it is not worth the risk of assuming that teachers could effectively use reintegrative shaming in a way that would lead to restored relationships and a feeling of diminished shame for the potential shooter who may already feel entrenched shame. Utilizing shame to discipline students, even when done in the name of RPs is dangerous and could lead to further school violence. Social scientist Gilligan (2003) contended that violence is used by people when they feel the only way to erase their shame is by shaming the ones they think shamed them. He argued that the most effective way to shame a person is through violence, and the most effective way to get someone to be violent is through shame. He added that "pain and punishment increase feelings of shame but decrease feelings of guilt … punishment-far from deterring or preventing violence, is the most powerful stimulant or cause of violence that we have yet discovered" (Gilligan, 2003, p. 1164). Shaming and punishment are easy, unimaginative, and ineffective at preventing school violence. Students and teachers deserve a more restorative way of being in relationships with one another than engaging with shame to discipline.

Students need to learn about their feelings of shame that they want to conceal and learn healthy ways to diminish those feelings (Marshall, 2020). A teacher can help students learn to manage feelings of shame and make retribution where necessary. Lustick (2017) also asserts that when using a Foucauldian lens, it becomes apparent that some schools may be redistributing disciplinary power to the restorative circle and that "the restorative circle leverages shame in order to discipline the mind and spirit of participants" (p. 306). Schools have the responsibility of ensuring that they are not recreating the old power dynamics of an authority figure meting out disciplinary consequences through the use of shaming in the restorative process.

Protecting and Fearing Youth

School violence creates a complex problem where children are viewed as both the perpetrators and victims of the violence. While school policies attempt to monitor and assess students for potential risk of violence, these are the same people the policies are meant to protect. Turning educators into surveillance criminologists to prevent school shootings may inadvertently add to a negative school environment of distrust and coercion that can lead to school violence (Warnick et al., 2010). Some schools have even entertained the idea of arming teachers as a way to ultimately protect students from potential shooters who might also be students. Warnick and Kapa (2019) commented that seeing children as potential threats leads to the "ultimate target-hardening strategy: arming teachers themselves. How might armed teachers think differently about their roles and relationships with students?" (p. 26). Although the Columbine shooting shifted the locus of fear to suburban schools and rampage shootings, research already showed that operating out of fear was not compatible with educational goals. Noguera (1995) wrote that when teachers operate out of fear, disorder, crime, and violence become standard as the focus of the teacher–student relationship is based on this fear and concerns about safety become more important than teaching.

After the Columbine shooting, safety took precedence. Schools implemented target hardening strategies that added to the negative school climate and were based on exaggerated risk, instilling more fear. Altheide (2009) explained that when schools operate out of fear, administrators assume all motives of potential school shooters are terroristic, which leads to the classroom environment being fundamentally changed. Student and teacher interactions are based on surveillance and discipline, and teachers view all student pranks and harmless copycat violent intentions seeking attention as needing a response equal to that of terroristic acts (Altheide, 2009). This atmosphere of fear and preemptive protection was exacerbated after the 9/11 terrorism attacks in the United States, and the Columbine story was once again reframed to link the school shootings to terrorism. Schools implemented

new lockdown drills with very little research into the psychological effects they inflict on students and teachers, and best practices for emergency preparedness (Schildkraut & Nickerson, 2020). Some critics also fear that training students in lockdown drills will enable future shooters, who are typically students themselves, to better plan future shootings (Densley, 2019). This again points out the dichotomous view of students as those to be protected and those to fear. Viewing students as potential threats or possible terrorists does not support the mission of caring for and educating students. While schools must be places of safety for students and staff, policies and procedures need to view students as people to be protected and supported rather than potential threats of future school violence.

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5 Possible Solutions to End School Shootings

Focusing on the Roots of the Issue

As seen in Chapter 4, current US school practices and policies are not eliminating school shootings as they cannot address the risk factors. Building quality relationships with students through RPs can help mitigate these risk factors and may help prevent school violence. Through this chapter, I discuss the importance of the use of RPs in helping teachers and students build relationships of trust that are proven to help prevent school violence. I conclude by discussing literature concerning possible ways to address future school shootings through threat-assessment teams and RPs, which both rely on trusting relationships.

Although we have evidence of what is not working in preventing school violence and we know that threat assessment teams and RPs have helped prevent school violence, more research is needed on what factors contribute to successfully thwarting school violence. In addition, teachers and school personnel need more training on how to effectively build relationships of trust based on RPs. Although we have been training teachers in classroom management, multicultural awareness, anti-bullying, and SEL for many years, we have not eliminated school shootings. On the contrary, school shootings have increased since the Columbine shooting in 1999 (Madfis, 2020). We want our children to thrive, and we can aspire to a higher goal than just preventing school shootings. We need to figure out how to keep kids from wanting to kill each other in the first place (Muschert & Madfis, 2014) while also intervening and stopping potentially violent plans from being carried out. As Madeline L'Engle says in *A Wind in the Door* through the protagonist Meg Wallace, "It's not right in the United States of America that a little kid shouldn't be safe in school" (p. 48). The wording of this statement is important for my research. Meg only mentions the United States of America, and she uses the phrase "be safe." School shootings almost exclusively occur in the United States, and this book addresses potential reasons for this. It is also important to note that our goal should not just be for children to feel safe at school, but also to actually be safe at school. This book investigates how RP can be used as a way to not only teach children

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about social-emotional intelligence and self-regulation as discrete tools for emotion regulation but also as a way of valuing all human life and teaching children to care for themselves and others, therefore, keeping everyone safe. This book further explores how other Columbine shooting survivors who have gone on to become teachers build relationships of trust with their students and how what they have learned can potentially help prevent future school shootings and provide survivor-informed best practices for school safety regarding school shootings.

Possible Ways to Prevent School Violence: Mental Health Services, Trauma-informed Practices, Bullying Prevention, Threat Assessment Teams, Restorative Justice, and Restorative Practices

Mental Health Services

In the wake of the Columbine shooting and with each subsequent school shooting, researchers, politicians, and the media suggest that addressing mental health could prevent school shootings. While addressing mental health in schools is desirable and good for students and staff, there is no direct link between mental illness and school shootings (Vossekuil et al., 2004). The link between mental illness and gun violence that is perpetuated in these discussions is not helpful. As Metzl and MacLeish (2015) explain, the discussions around mental illness that arise after mass shootings "frequently reflect larger cultural issues that become obscured when mass shootings come to stand in for all gun crime and when 'mentally ill' ceases to be a medical designation and becomes a sign of violent threat" (p. 241).

Researchers continue to suggest addressing mental health concerns (Schildkraut & Nickerson, 2020; Skiba, 2014) as a way to address school violence. The need for a more nuanced understanding of mental illness and how it relates to school shootings is necessary to help prevent school shootings. Vossekuil et al. (2004) found that for school shooters that while a history of having mental health evaluations, being diagnosed with a mental disorder, or substance abuse was not common, most offenders had suicidal ideations or attempts, or intense depression or hopelessness. Continued suicide prevention and suicide screening are suggested to help prevent school shootings. But just as teachers are not first responders, they are also not mental health clinicians and should not be expected to perform these roles. Teachers need to be aware of warning signs of suicide and depression and seek help for their students, but they are not mental health professionals. Even mental health professionals cannot be expected to identify potentially dangerous people. That gives mental health workers "potentially untenable positions because the legal duties they are asked to perform misalign with the predictive value of their expertise. Mental health workers are in these

instances asked to provide clinical diagnoses to social and economic problems" (Metzl & MacLeish, 2015, p. 246). The same is being asked of teachers when they are expected to diagnose a student's potential for school violence. If the larger ecological factors surrounding gun violence and guns are not addressed, teachers cannot prevent all school violence solely by ensuring that their students have access to mental health care. Madfis (2016) contended that while some researchers have focused on the mental health concerns of certain school shooters, the fact that most people with mental illness are not violent then "one must still strive to understand why someone with a mental health issue would desire to commit a rampage attack and not neglect external motivations" (p. 24).

While politicians and the NRA quickly blame mental illness when another school rampage shooting occurs, without knowing if it is a factor in the cause, the effects of school shootings on the mental health of survivors are definitely occurring. Addressing mental health to prevent school shootings needs to be more than words used to appease the public and distract from the real cause of school shootings, access to firearms. If the United States is not going to address access to firearms, then mental health services need to be improved and in place to help survivors of school shootings with the trauma they endured (Ko et al., 2008) and will continue to endure for the remainder of their lives.

Trauma-informed Practices

As many teachers and administrators recognize that the trauma that students bring with them into the classroom affects the classroom environment and learning outcomes, the use of trauma-informed approaches is increasing in many US schools. Cavanaugh (2016) describes Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as a list of ten experiences grouped into three categories—abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction—which can be traumatic for the children who experience them. The more ACEs a child experiences, the more likely they are to experience negative outcomes later in life, such as poor health along with other factors that negatively impact school outcomes, such as impairment of social, emotional, and cognitive abilities, as well as social problems (Cavanaugh, 2016). With an estimated 64% of people experiencing at least one ACE (Cavanaugh, 2016), it is likely that teachers will encounter students who exhibit behaviors based on their traumatic experiences, leading to negative outcomes at school. Teachers need training in trauma-informed educational practices and trauma-informed pedagogies to understand how to respond to students experiencing trauma.

While the research is lacking on the effectiveness of trauma-informed approaches, schools are implementing them as a way to serve the students who increasingly come to school with varying levels of traumatic experiences.

Although the original ACEs study was conducted by Felitti et al. (1998) included a narrow list of potentially traumatic experiences such as psychological abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, domestic violence, parental separation or divorce, mental illness in the household, household substance abuse, and criminal household member, current research has expanded to include other forms of adverse experiences that are more culturally inclusive of different types of trauma including natural disasters and various forms of violence (Rishel et al., 2019).

While school shootings are not on the official list of ACEs, in their study of ACEs and teacher training in trauma-informed elementary schools (TIES), Rishel et al. (2019) used a study based on data from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network that used a broader definition of trauma to include school violence, community violence, disasters, among other traumatic experiences. As teachers and students are exposed to more violence at school and through the media as secondary trauma, teachers need more training in how to respond to their own trauma and their students' trauma.

Rishel et al. (2019) studied the TIES utilizing the attachment, self-regulation, and competency (ARC) framework that was piloted in West Virginia in 2015 as an early intervention program. The first component of the program is training teachers in ACEs and the ARC framework. "Training components help teachers learn to manage their own reactions; create the sense of safety children need; and help children build the skills needed to understand, manage, and express their own feelings" (Rishel et al., 2019, p. 242). The inclusion of teachers learning to manage their own reactions and address their own trauma is key in trauma-informed pedagogies. This is especially true when it pertains to a school shooting that affects students and teachers. Teachers are often put in the role of protecting students and keeping them safe during a school shooting, and their own trauma must be addressed along with the trauma of their students. Parents and other caregivers were also trained and included in the understanding of and response to trauma. This is also necessary when it pertains to a school shooting, as the whole community is affected to some degree.

Bullying Prevention

One of the narratives the media propagated immediately after the Columbine shooting was that the shooters, Eric and Dylan, were bullied outcasts. While this narrative did not prove true (Cullen, 2009), the anti-bullying movement quickly started and gained traction. States quickly passed anti-bullying legislation, and schools implemented anti-bullying programs and policies.

Even the research on the causal nature of bullying on school shootings is unclear and contradictory. Leary et al. (2003) explained that since most people experience teasing, bullying, or rejection before reaching adulthood and

do not seek revenge on classmates, rejection alone may be a factor leading to violence, but is not the singular causation of violence. Later, Leary et al. (2003) stated, "we believe that the primary motive in most of the school shootings seems to have been retribution, either for an ongoing pattern of ostracism and teasing or for an acute rejection such as a romantic breakup" (p. 212). Warnick et al. (2015) expressed their surprise at how little school shooters had in common, explaining that some were bullied while others were bullies. Vossekuil et al. (2004) found that several attackers experienced bullying that was severe, greatly impacted the attacker, and likely led to their decision to attack their schools. While the research is indecisive about the link between being bullied and school shootings, it is clear that bullying is harmful to students and does not lead to any positive outcomes.

The research on anti-bullying programs is also fraught with discrepancies. Ferguson et al. (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of anti-bullying programs in schools. They concluded that "it is not possible to conclude that school-based anti-bullying programs produce a meaningful or practically significant effect on bullying or violent behavior among school children" (Ferguson et al., 2007, p. 410). They concluded that anti-bullying programs are ineffective because 1) unlike often cited, bullies are confident, normal children who use bullying to climb the social ladder. They reject these programs that ask them to work with peers as equals. There is no motivation for bullies to participate. 2) Violent behavior is both learned and genetic. Behavior-based interventions alone may not be enough to address bullying. 3) School violence was also at a low-time low, so maybe bullying is also lower. The reasons for this low level are not well understood (Ferguson et al., 2007, p. 411). Ferguson et al. (2007) did find that the school-based anti-bullying interventions were more successful for students identified as seriously at risk and efforts might be better aimed at this population. But the study did not define what "at-risk" means. This term has typically been used to label students experiencing poverty and minority students, suggesting that they are at risk of failing academically without addressing the role of society and the historical lack of resources. If the term in this study is inferring students who are at risk of committing bullying, the term should also take into account the societal biological factors surrounding the behavior. On the other hand, Gaffney et al. (2021) concluded that anti-bullying programs in schools effectively reduce bullying perpetration and victimization depending on the moderating variables. Although the research may show that there is a small but significant effect of school-based anti-bullying, and research on school shootings indicates that school shooters are as likely to be bullied as to be the bullies, schools need to actively work to root out bullying.

Bullying is an insidious problem that has no place in our schools. Rampage shootings are more common when teachers or administrators have not taken bullying seriously or done something about it (Madfis, 2015). But as Perlstein

(2000) points out, "Frequently overlooked by teachers and administrators, bullying, sexual harassment, and other such activities that students use to assert power and maintain their place in the pecking order are simultaneously pervasive and invisible" (p. 78). If these acts of aggression and violence are mostly invisible, as Perlstein claims, then how can teachers address them without students coming forward to get help? Cohen et al. (2009) argued that to uphold the United Nations 1948 Convention on the Rights of Children "schools must respect the inherent dignity of the child, create a climate of tolerance of, respect for, and appreciation of human differences, and bar practices of bullying and disciplinary practices that harm or humiliate" (p. 203). While schools may want to reach this goal, cyberbullying has made this topic all the more difficult, as many acts of bullying now take place online or away from the school, where teachers are less likely to know about this form of violence. For teachers and administrators to address bullying, students must have relationships of trust with teachers so that they can get help when they are being bullied. Crownover and Jones (2018) called for teachers to engage in relational pedagogy, where teachers and administrators build positive relationships with students, and preservice teacher programs would train teachers to use relational pedagogy in their classrooms, making relational pedagogy a way to curb the bullying epidemic. Weber and Vereenooghe (2020) found that RPs can positively impact teacher–student relationships and also student–peer relationships, especially when it comes to bullying. It is imperative that schools work to build a climate where bullying is not tolerated and all students feel safe and seen.

Threat Assessment Teams

One response to school violence that has the potential to prevent violence is the use of threat assessment teams. In response to the Columbine shooting, a collaboration between the US Secret Service and the US Department of Education was started in June 1999 that looked at 37 targeted school attacks in the United States between 1974 and June 2000. The group wanted to answer the questions: "Could we have known that these attacks were being planned?" and "What can be done to prevent future attacks from happening?" (Vossekuil et al., 2004, p. 3). There were several important findings from their report for schools. The report found the following: attacks were rarely impulsive. Other people knew about a possible attack before most of the incidents. Most attackers did not threaten their targets before the attack. "There is no accurate or useful profile of students who engaged in targeted school violence" (Vossekuil et al., 2004, p. 36). Most attackers had behavior that concerned someone or pointed to a need for help before the incident. Most attackers exhibited difficulty handling "significant losses or personal failures," and considering or attempting suicide was also prevalent. "Being

bullied, persecuted, or injured" was felt by many who committed the attacks (Vossekuil et al., 2004, p. 38). The report also found that: most of the attackers were able to access weapons and had used them in the past, many of the incidents had other people involved with the attack in some way, and even though law enforcement responded quickly in most incidents, the majority were stopped by something other than law enforcement and did not last long (Vossekuil et al., 2004). Schools looking to prevent school shootings must have more systematic ways of evaluating the risk of future violence.

Using threat assessment teams as intended, as a way to evaluate the risk for school shootings, may help prevent some future attacks. Warnick and Kapa (2019) found that forming threat assessment teams is "a promising trend in school security" (p. 28) where teams of school personnel, law enforcement, and professionals from other areas, such as social workers, "systematically assess threatening student behavior to determine the nature and severity of the threat" (p. 28). This is not the same as profiling because "it is based on a student's own threatening behavior, not a generic outline of social background and personality traits" (Warnick & Kapa, 2019, p. 28). Research supports this idea by demonstrating that there is not a consistent profile of a school shooter or single risk factor in all school shooting cases (Borum et al., 2010; Madfis, 2020; Muschert & Madfis, 2014; Vossekuil et al., 2004). Using threat assessment allows the assessment team to react appropriately based on the level of threat perceived. The trusting communication and relationship building necessary for a positive school environment helps the process of threat assessment because it not only can identify risks but also offer support to the students who are deemed at-risk for violence (Skiba, 2014; Vossekuil et al., 2004; Warnick & Kapa, 2019). Threat assessment teams may help reduce violence in schools when built upon relationships of trust and care.

The idea of a threat assessment team has been adopted by many schools, but it is important for teachers and administrators to not turn into criminologists or law enforcement personnel seeing students as potential threats. Unlike the threat assessment used by the Secret Service with public officials, schools are places where teachers are meeting more than just the physical safety needs of children and are listening to and meeting these various needs (Noddings, 2012a, 2012b). For threat assessment teams to be successful, there must be caring relationships of trust between students and school personnel. Warnick and Kapa (2019) stated that schools should work to further develop open communication and trusting relationships that allow people to report possible violence. "The greatest benefit of this trust-building approach over target hardening is that its 'side effects' are likely to support the educational mission of schools rather than disrupt it" (p. 27). They added, "Scholars have noted that trust is one of the core elements, not only of safe schools but also of effective schools. Safety and success go hand in hand"

(p. 28). Learning to build relationships of trust is essential for school personnel for academic success and for a positive school climate, leading to safety for all.

Gereluk et al. (2015) commented that while schools cannot eliminate all risks or predict all threats, reasonable measures can be put in place. The challenge is balancing safety concerns with a purposeful rationale and reasonableness since no clear patterns exist with intent in school gun violence (Gereluk et al., 2015). Schools must balance the varied goals and values that have become increasingly complex as schools are now more than just places whose mission is to create model citizens. As teachers become increasingly responsible for the safety and the education of children, Borum et al. (2010) reminded us that, "The key challenge is how best to achieve a balanced and reasonable set of policies that maintain appropriate vigilance and disciplinary structure and minimize risk of serious harm, yet facilitate a fair and interpersonally supportive climate in the school" (p. 35). Schools that help everyone build trusting relationships have the potential to effectively implement threat assessment teams as a way to prevent school violence.

Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices

There is promising research in the field of RJ and RPs that suggests that their use both strives toward preventing school violence and creates a climate of safety and care for students. While there are many types of curriculum and support programs that are beneficial for students, such as SEL and School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), RPs are philosophically different from these other forms of support and may prove more beneficial for preventing school violence as the relationships of trust are at the core of the philosophy (Gregory et al., 2014; McCluskey et al., 2008; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). RPs have their roots in RJ as a philosophy that aims to repair harm in relationships. While there are a variety of terms and definitions for the terms "restorative justice" and "restorative practices," I will use RP when referring to the practices in a school setting and RJ for the overarching philosophy often situated in the criminal justice system.

RPs adopted in schools come from the philosophy of RJ that seeks to repair harm, focusing on victims and offenders in cases of criminal offenses. Braithwaite (2002) asserted that throughout history, societies operated out of RJ principles with regard to criminal justice until the end of the Dark Ages when crime was transformed "into a matter of fealty to and felony against the king, instead of a wrong done to another person…a central part of the monarch's program of domination of his people" (p. 5). The origins of RJ in Western society began in the criminal justice system in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, with what is called the Kitchener Experiment in 1974

(Evans & Vaandering, 2016). A collaboration between a Mennonite Central Committee volunteer and a parole office offered juvenile delinquents the opportunity to repair the harm they caused in a restorative way instead of going through the criminal system. The field of RJ also has origins in Indigenous practices, such as the Navajo and Māori systems that allow for solving community problems within the community, predating the Western application (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). With this long understanding of RJ as being about relationships and repairing harm, and offering forgiveness, schools are looking to RJ to help transform schools into more caring places that can address school violence.

Within the school setting, there are different understandings of the purposes of RP, the terms to use for the practices, the goals for using RP, and how to measure its success. Many schools adopt RP with the intention of addressing disproportionate disciplinary actions for minority students, and while this is often an outcome of using RJ in schools (Nussbaum, 2018), the theoretical framework of RJ is more than just responding to harm and behavior management. Evans and Vaandering (2016) explained the purpose of RJE, "to create spaces of belonging that embrace everyone in the ways they require" (p. 10) based on three tenets of creating just and equitable learning environments, nurturing healthy relationships, repairing harm, and transforming conflict. RJE holds the core belief that people are worthy and relational and values respect, dignity, and mutual concern (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). In a webinar addressing changes in RJE since the publication of their book, Eastern Mennonite University and Vaandering (2022) further clarified that for her RJE is not fundamentally about repairing harm to relationships. She explained, "We're restoring that understanding that all people are worthy and interconnected. It's not about restoring a relationship. All of those things are important. Do I truly recognize everybody I come in contact with as worthy?"(Eastern Mennonite University and Vaandering 2022). While a unified definition and implementation of RP and RJ are unnecessary and in contrast to the understanding of the particularity of the contexts in which RJ are employed, more systematic research on schools implementing RP would help further the field and train more teachers. It is also important that research on RJE not continue affirming the traditional systems of schooling but focus on the transformative possibilities of RJE based on relational and decolonizing approaches to research and education (Reimer & Parker-Shandal, 2023).

Despite the need for more research, there is a growing body of research indicating the effectiveness of RP. The first recorded instance of a school using RP was in 1994 in Australia to address an assault in Queensland, Australia (Davis, 2019). Buckmaster's (2016) review of the literature of a number of schools using RJ to address the pragmatics of the approach showed a reduction in long-term suspensions and bullying and a decrease in

the disciplinary racial gap. Gregory et al.'s (2014) results indicated that students perceived the implementation of RP similarly despite different racial/ethnic backgrounds, which is a promising finding given that many schools turn to RP as a way to address racial discipline disproportionality. The Scottish Executive funded a two-year pilot program in 2004 using RP in schools that showed so many benefits in the pilot program that it was extended for two more years, 2006–2008 (McCluskey et al., 2008). The findings from the pilot program found that "In many schools there was a clear positive impact on relationships, seen in the views and actions of staff and pupils and in a reduction of playground incidents, discipline referrals, exclusion and need for external support" (McCluskey et al., 2008, p. 415). Although Acosta et al.'s (2016) research was ongoing at the time of publication, they hypothesized that the school environment of RP Intervention (RPI) schools would see a dramatic improvement compared to the others. Quantitative and qualitative studies show positive outcomes for RP to varying degrees based on the type and level of implementation (Buckmaster, 2016; McCluskey et al., 2008; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Even with this evidence, Morrison and Vaandering (2012) argued the need for research and development for the praxis of RJ. This need is based on a lack of "conceptual clarity in characterizing and operationalizing the paradigm shift that RJ embodies within schools" (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012, p. 148). Four years later, Buckmaster (2016) also attested that RJ has the potential to improve the climate of schools, but also concluded that more research is needed with regard to policy and organizational procedures and the mindset needed to implement RPs (p. 5). While evidence supports the benefits of RP, the lack of a comprehensive understanding of RP and varying degrees of implementation hinder the more widespread adoption of RP in US schools.

Many schools initially adopt RP to address racial disproportionally in disciplinary outcomes, and the literature indicates that RP reduces the disciplinary racial gap (Buckmaster, 2016) and that students of different ethnic/racial backgrounds perceive the implementation of RP the same (Gregory et al., 2014). During President Obama's tenure, the Department of Justice and Department of Education required schools to "transform exclusionary discipline policies or else face federal civil rights lawsuits" (Davis, 2019, p. 52), and many schools took on RP to address this problem. But there is very little research directly addressing race and RJ, which Gavrielides (2014) calls the "paradox of restorative justice" (p. 218). This paradox highlights the problem that is supposedly being addressed. Even though many schools adopt RJ or RP to address racial disproportionality, not many studies "focus on the potential of restorative justice to reduce racial disparities in school discipline" (Davis, 2019, p. 52). The research that has been done shows that schools with "a greater percentage of Black students decreased the likelihood that a school would use an overall restorative justice model of

discipline" (Payne & Welch, 2015, p. 554). Students of color are seen as having a deficit and needing to be fixed with some type of disciplinary system or restorative process. Without acknowledging institutional racism and doing work in anti-racism alongside RP work, there is little hope for changes in the disproportionate treatment of students of color without the transformation of the RP practitioners. The stereotype of white as victims and black as offenders is also carried over into schools' adoption of RJ to address discipline disproportionally without acknowledging the disproportionate harm that Black youth also face (Davis, 2019, p. 72). I faced my own implicit bias while undertaking this study. While participating in the Eastern Mennonite webinar "Rethinking the Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education: Changes since 2016," I recognized that I had not cited any non-white RJ practitioners or authors. I acknowledge my own white-centered ways of knowing and being, and recognize that when I am confronted with my implicit bias that it is my responsibility to do something about it. I have added citations from non-white RJ practitioners and further discussed the paradox of using RJ for racial disproportionally without asking schools to do implicit bias training and anti-racism work. It is my responsibility to give space to RJ and RP practitioners of color to speak to the idea of race and RJ. Valandra (2020) voiced:

> Whereas one might think that the RJ movement would shine in championing racial and social justice, the movement has actually been silent, afraid, and conforming--complacent with institutional and structural harms. Rather than changing systems, RJ processes are called on to "patch up" the harms that racist and colonizing structures and institutions cause routinely. For example, a student of color who chafes at the racial microaggressions that White teachers and staff commit on a daily basis becomes "the problem," one that a restorative process is expected to "fix"—without naming the racial experience.
>
> (p. 13)

The racial experience of students of Color must be addressed when implementing RP and ensured that teachers and staff address institutional racism and implicit bias. While there is no one set of practices or one specific way of using RP, there are organizations and groups working to further the work of RJ. The International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP) developed RPI in 1999 to train teachers and all school staff who interact with students in essential elements designed to be used comprehensively throughout the school with all relationships (Acosta et al., 2016). While the ideal is for all school personnel who interact with students to use the principles of RP, the philosophy of RJ maintains that participation should be voluntary for it to be truly restorative (Zehr, 2015b). This makes implementing it through a

school-wide mandate less than ideal. Without a transformation of belief and way of seeing students and understanding harm to relationships instead of breaking rules, RP runs the risk of being just another disciplinary tool used to control students.

As schools contemplate how to respond to school violence and how to prevent future violence, relationships are key. The safety and flourishing of all students depend on the types of relationships of trust that are built between students and between students and teachers (Buckmaster, 2016; Gregory et al., 2014; Madfis, 2020; Warnick et al., 2015). Researchers (Cohen et al., 2009; Koth et al., 2008) have shown the importance of the classroom climate, and teachers need to understand their role in helping students build positive relationships, but a more coherent understanding of and training in what this care entails is necessary (Hollweck et al., 2019; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Reimer, 2018). As schools move away from social control to social engagement (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012), teachers need help transforming their way of thinking and changing the lens (Zehr, 2015a) through which they view students and behaviors, and offer support instead of control "defined by the provisions offered to an individual to aid in their ultimate flourishing and fulfillment of potential" (Buckmaster, 2016, p. 3). While crime and student delinquency and misbehavior are not synonymous, it is helpful to rethink how they are defined and addressed. As Braithwaite (2002) posited, "Crime is an opportunity to prevent greater evils, to confront crime with a grace that transforms human lives to paths of love and giving" (p. 3). RJ and RP offer tools that can lead to an environment based on social engagement, but there is also the potential for it to be another form of punitive disciplinary action used to control students and gain compliance (Reimer, 2018).

For schools to truly live out the RJ values and RP essential elements, teachers need training and experiential learning with RJ in their teacher preparation programs (Hollweck et al., 2019) and through ongoing professional development while simultaneously addressing implicit bias and institutional racism (Davis, 2019, p. 59). While an ethic of care focuses on women's experiences and the role of the carer and cared for, it is similar to the philosophy of RJ. Noddings (2012b) believed care can be taught and learned through experiences, and the same is true of RJ. To achieve this, Noddings (2012b) declared that for boys to develop a caring capacity, they must have the experience of being involved with caregiving activities while providing them with direction and supervision from people who are "genuine carers" (p. 56). Gay (2019) agreed with Noddings, stating that care ethics can be reduced to women doing care and men doing justice, but this is not a useful way of viewing men and women as so distinctly different. He suggested that "together, restorative justice and care ethics offer a very promising philosophical approach to a model of justice that fosters forgiveness and

reconciliation" (Gay, 2019, p. 41). Teachers must model RP with their students and with their colleagues to transform the relationships of schools from ones of control to ones of engagement, where all students can flourish. Instead of looking for ways to prevent school violence and school shootings through the punishment of behavior and assessing students as potential risks, we need to "focus on preventing students from having the desire to harm their peers in the first place, rather than merely managing the behavior of risky individuals through assessment and security" (Muschert & Madfis, 2014, p. 31). The use of RP and RJ has the potential to transform relationships into ones of care and trust, with the possibility of preventing more school violence.

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6 What Columbine Survivors Who Are Teachers Think Schools Should Do to Prepare for Active Shooters and What Teachers Should be Taught to Prevent School Shootings

Participants shared themes related to three spheres of influence concerning what they want to be addressed regarding preparing for active shooters, preventing school shootings, and what they believe are best practices. They shared what they do in their classrooms, what they want their school to do, and what they wish the United States would do. I will also be sharing my own autoethnography about each theme as well.

In My Classroom

Some participants shared tactics they use to make their classrooms safe based on self-described responses to the trauma of the Columbine shooting. These responses included such things as always keeping a clear space in case of needing a place to hide or setting up the classroom with the door clear, and having a pair of sharp scissors handy. While participants recognized that they think differently from non-survivor teachers, current training and drills are asking all teachers to think through a school shooting and plan as if they will be in one at some point. For this reason, some of the suggestions made by participants based on their trauma are also now considered to be what all teachers should do in their classrooms. A few participants spoke to general recommendations for teachers that they consider "best practices": being aware of mental health concerns and mandatory reporting.

Many participants shared how they look for warning signs and use mandatory reporting when concerned about their students. They also recommended this as a best practice for all teachers. Abby, Claire, Elizabeth, Goldie, and Louisa discussed red flags and warning signs that they felt teachers should know about. Abby thinks that teachers should watch out for "violent pictures, behavior, suicidal thoughts, lack of engagement with anger issues." Claire explained that for teachers, "You need to be aware of what you're doing and who these kids are. We are one of the first lines of defense as teachers to see these flags." Elizabeth listed "kids that are antisocial, not making eye contact, not having friendships or relationships" as warning

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signs that teachers should be aware of. Goldie talked about "signs to watch out for." Louisa stated that teachers need to be aware of red flags in the same way that they are for suicide prevention. Some participants addressed mandatory reporting, which is the follow-up on the red flags and warning signs that teachers notice. Jamie commented, "Teach teachers about mandatory reporting, see something say something." Rachel spoke about the need for classes that invite reflective writing to have "totally clear ways of setting expectations for the students and for the institution about what the reporting requirements should be." Once teachers recognize that a student needs help, some participants spoke about the need to address mental health services. Theresa stated that teacher education should prepare teachers to "take care of students' mental health needs." While Goldie sees a push for mental health in the education department, she does not believe "it is there yet." She commented, "Mental health, I think, is huge, too. I don't know if you could catch it early on, I don't know if you could know that. We've known it with some of the shooters, but others not so much." Jamie suggested that teachers have training on warning signs and getting students the help they need. Megan added the importance of addressing the mental health concerns of the teachers dealing with the stress of possible school shootings remarking, "I also think making mental health courses for teachers would be helpful, too, on how to manage the stress of it could happen here." Anne spoke to the idea brought up by Megan that teachers now expect to learn about school shootings and assume it is part of the job to possibly be in an active shooter lockdown. She remarked bitterly:

> Teachers should not have to address this, it's insanity. It makes me angry. What should they learn about it? Teachers who are training now grew up in this, and have been having these conversations since elementary school. Lock your door, and here's how you use a belt if the door won't lock. Here's how you hide. Here's how you teach your students to be quiet. Just so fucked up. None of that should be what we have to do, and it is, and I really hate it.

Autoethnography

Unlike some participants, I have never set up my classroom specifically for safety during an active shooting, but I am constantly aware of the possibility of risk and danger in my classroom. Mandatory reporting is a best practice for all US teachers. While there is no law mandating reporting in New Zealand schools, I recommend it as a best practice for all teachers to know where to report suspicions of child abuse or neglect. I advocate for mental health resources and SEL for all students. It is important for teachers to know their students well and to have conversations with them so that they

have more to go on than a piece of violent writing. Eric and Dylan wrote violent papers, but also had so many other warning signs that needed to be taken into consideration. I agree with Megan that teachers need to learn about school safety and what they can do in their classrooms when they are preservice teachers, and to also have mental health resources available to handle the stress of the risks they face. The classroom is the only nexus of control that an individual teacher has, and I strongly agree with the participants who said that the problem of school shootings is not something teachers should have to address. It should not be the job of a teacher to keep their students safe in an active shooting due to a lack of gun control and access to firearms.

In My School

Participants talked about current school safety measures and their opinions of these, as well as some of their recommendations. The categories that emerged were safety features, lockdown drills are "sad but necessary," limitations of law enforcement, "luck where you are," arming teachers is laughable and dangerous, and take our advice, we know what we're talking about.

Safety Features

A few participants talked about safety features that schools are using to prevent school shootings and their opinions on those. Anne remarked, "I think there are best practices, having the doors locked, using intercoms to get in. I'm always glad when schools are doing that." When she was a school administrator helping design a new school building, the executive director was also a Columbine survivor, which influenced how they designed the building for safety. Anne explained, "I felt like we did all the things we could do in that situation, constructing the building in a way with a secure entrance. Candid conversations with our students and staff about what we would do." Matthew commented, "I think the schools are doing the best they can, with the limited amount of resources we're already given … SROs are fine, I don't think metal detectors or more police will help." In contrast, Anne thought it might be the right time for US schools to adopt metal detectors stating:

> Honestly, I wish schools could have metal detectors. I wish that were practiced, but it isn't and I don't know why. I know some of the reasons why. I don't know what else schools could do. It could make it feel like there is a threat, create fear for students and lead to a more suspicious sort of environment. Honestly, I think that is happening anyhow: threat, suspicion, fear. Maybe we'd tolerate it now since those things are already happening.

While some participants mentioned how drills and safety training seem to be going back to basics, such as locking doors, Theresa talked about how schools continue to adopt the latest trend in school safety. Her school has added the Stop the Bleed training to their yearly lockdown training at the beginning of the year which "teaches you how to pat wounds, use a tourniquet." Some schools now have safety teams that work on procedures and protocols. Theresa remarked, "I feel a lot safer in the last couple of years with what the safety team has put in place." Part of the reason she feels safer is the adoption of a new safety feature, which Theresa described as red bags containing "gauze and medical equipment and a QR code." The QR code allows anyone in the room to communicate directly with law enforcement to relay vital information, such as how many people are in the room and if anyone needs to come out of the room. For Theresa, it's "amazing to think from Columbine to now, we now have a way to communicate."

Autoethnography

As a teacher in the United States, I was asked to keep outside doors locked at all times but was not in a school that required me to lock my classroom door. I did not keep my classroom door locked when I taught in the United States. If I were to teach in the United States again, I would keep my classroom door locked because it is the only nexus of control I have. I did not realize Columbine High School had an SRO while I attended school there until I was doing the research for this project. I do not think SROs solve the problem of school shootings and do not condone having guns on school campuses.

One of my schools did adopt some of the latest safety features, such as a glass-breaking tool to break out the window if we needed to escape through the window in case of an active shooting inside the building. I was also part of a training on Stop the Bleed, which seemed horrifying to me at the time of the training. I could not believe our answer to school shootings was to just assume they would keep happening and prepare a teacher to make a tourniquet for a shot student or colleague. However, writing this book has made me recognize that teachers face the risk of school shootings every day they enter a US classroom, and they do need to be prepared to respond to an active shooting. But by continuing to feel hopeful with the latest safety, we are ignoring the larger problem of access to guns that are entering our schools and threatening our children's lives and the lives of teachers.

Lockdown Drills Are Sad But Necessary

Many participants shared their sadness about the continued need for lockdown drills for active shooters, but recognized their necessity. While the National Association of School Psychologists and the National Association

of School Resource Officers (2021) jointly published *Best Practice Considerations for Schools in Active Shooter and Other Armed Assailant Drills*, and there are different types of lockdown drills, this book does not spend time discussing the differences. Despite there being recommended best practices, schools do not all adopt them, and there continues to be a lack of uniformity surrounding lockdown drills and what is best for students and staff. Participants spoke about lockdown drills in general. Megan shared, "I think it's (active shootings), unfortunately, a thing that happens way too much. I do think schools should teach about it. Sending in a teacher blindly is not fair to the teacher." Jamie explained, "It breaks my heart that we do lockdown drills, but it's about muscle memory. A coworker of mine was in the Las Vegas shooting. The only reason she knew what to do was from her training in school." Claire described lockdowns with her three- and four-year-old preschool students. Her school always gives them advance notice of the drill, and she prepares her students by telling them that they have to be safe from "some tricky people." Claire shared:

> They take it so seriously. They sit there in the dark under their backpacks. It's sad, but they're resilient. I always ask if they have any questions, and always tell the parents. They suck on a lollipop and listen to a story.

Megan added, "I think they're worth it. They've saved multiple lives here in the States. Look at the age of the kids seeing the videos and accommodate accordingly. I hate the drills, but I understand why we do them." Theresa explained why she believes lockdowns are necessary:

> Lockdown drills, traumatic as they can be, are really important. Our kids know how to do a lockdown. They can do it very quickly. They've been doing it since elementary school. It kind of breaks my heart, but I've seen how well they can do it. Helping kids see they're in a safe place, and there's a plan. Honestly, I think that's traumatic enough for the kids. Beyond that, I wouldn't have any other kind of training.

Goldie's school has the yearly lockdown training like the other participants, but she does not think it is particularly effective. She shared about the training for lockdowns, stating, "I don't think they do a very good job for the exact space that you're in. They generalize the space you're in like every classroom is the same. I've always had questions based on that." Louisa did bring up the controversy surrounding the reenactment drills, or drills where people act like shooters, but she believed the protocol helps, and students and teachers need to know what to do in a lockdown. When six of her school's students were shot outside the school and came into the building, she was with a group of students in a classroom where no one knew the

protocols for that room. She concluded, "We've had multiple shootings at my school and stabbings, and these protocols come into play." Abby disagreed with Louisa's point about students practicing lockdown drills. She said that her latest belief is that only staff should practice the drills because "I kind of wonder if America doing all the drills kind of encourages it, excitement, darkness, puts that thought in kids' heads of that this is exciting." Abby stated that "going through the motions of it, video with daunting music, it's messed up. These kids have done it for their entire childhood." She conjectured that students "don't know the terrible consequences of their actions at that age if they choose to do it." Elizabeth expressed fear about having to take part in a live-action drill. She said it would be very hard for her as a teacher, but recognized that "Police officers and law enforcement feels different than how a teacher would prepare." Elizabeth remarked, "But it's important to do a drill, actions to take, where should we be, how do we give communication to those on the outside to gain help for us?" for teachers and schools. Anne agreed that live-action enactment would be difficult for her as a Columbine survivor, stating, "I've never been involved with pellet guns, that is a good thing, I would not do well with that." Abby feels frustrated acting out drills like they are real and said, "I just want it to be a drill."

While most participants agreed on the necessity of lockdown drills, the details of the drills were not discussed. The idea for a standard protocol and common language was addressed by a few participants. Louisa shared that part of her recovery journey is working with a nonprofit called the I Love You Guys that conducts safety training for schools, workplaces, and places of worship. Louisa often presents at their conferences, sharing her personal story of surviving the Columbine shooting. She expressed, "Teachers should know the protocols for their districts … Teachers need to know the why behind it." Louisa explained that in her presentations:

> I give my personal story on April 20. I know why you get behind a locked door, how long it takes the cops to show up. And I know the facts and the pathos behind it. That feeling of preparation and security is important for teachers to have because you're the teacher in the room. It's your job to lead and be the person who knows the things.

Matthew also recommended the I Love You Guys training, stating, "I Love You Guys set the bar for what we need to do to ensure that the kids are safe: plan in place, posters on all the walls, code words." For Louisa, "These protocols are more like guidelines," which she sees as helpful for emergencies at school. She also recommended the Standard Response Protocol (SRP) because "I like the variety of things, not just yellow orange red, not just for active shooters. Shelter in place tornado on the soccer field. It runs the gamut for needs." Having a standard protocol allows law enforcement to know what to expect and what to do at each school.

Autoethnography

Writing this book has influenced what I think about lockdown drills. I agree with participants that they are sad, but necessary, with the current US laws on guns and access to guns. Teachers and students should know what to do if they go into a lockdown, but I know that the data do not show that they are effective and may be harmful. So, I feel conflicted about this topic, but I have suggestions for best practices surrounding lockdown drills. Give a warning to all staff and students that a lockdown will occur. Practicing under stress is not necessary or helpful for muscle memory to take place or for people to take it seriously. The drills should not be live-action drills. Schools do need to coordinate with local law enforcement and emergency services, but the drills should not be a way to trick or try to catch teachers doing things incorrectly. I attended a conference held by the I Love You Guys, and one of the more interesting sessions was about the responsibility that emergency personnel have to not cause further harm to people affected by a school shooting. I agree. The most stressful part of the whole day on April 20, 1999, was when the SWAT team showed up at our door. They had to treat us all as suspects, which meant they were loud and patted us down multiple times. Walking through how to lock the doors, finding a space to hide, and talking about the need to remain flexible to change what you do in response to the situation unfolding is an important part of a lockdown drill.

Since being in New Zealand, I have participated in a lockdown drill training with a professional organization. My school knew that I was a school shooting survivor and took special care to talk through the training with me before the training, which I appreciated. The man leading the training shared his information without the use of photos or videos and did not sensationalize what he was sharing. In New Zealand, it is also more likely that a lockdown might be used for a swarm of bees than a school shooting. The presenter shared this example, and I felt overwhelmed thinking about this because I have always found it strange that on the day of the Columbine shooting, my brain thought that the commotion might be bees. It has never made sense to me, and I sometimes joke about it. But I think I feel ashamed that my brain went to that idea when searching to make meaning of the situation. I am grateful that I live in a place where that is a legitimate reason for a lockdown drill, because some schools teach their students how to keep bees and harvest honey. I love that a school allows bees on its campus but not guns.

Limitations of Law Enforcement

But at the same time that some participants recommended a standard protocol for school shootings and lockdowns, there were also a few comments about the limits of what law enforcement knows and can do. Abby shared that the SRO at her school said, "'I can be anywhere in this school in 10

seconds.' One, he's not there every day. I still don't believe he could. That's still however much time. None of those fix it, SROs, more video cameras." Megan told the security officer why she would not utilize the plan he laid out for her safety, because it might mean she would walk in front of a perpetrator to get to the kitchen, which has a computer and a button that would link her to the police. She commented, "I tried to explain in non-survivor ways then pulled out my ace card and said, 'You do this because of what I went through.' I think it is a control piece." Megan explained that this school district also had a school shooting. She said, "I would have thought they would have more understanding. That officer has not talked to me since, he waves, which is fine. I'm not walking to the kitchen." These participants pointed out the limitations they see with what law enforcement can do to prevent school shootings.

"The Video"

While participants were not particularly satisfied with the lockdown drills, many recognized the necessity for them and also mentioned that only watching "the video" was not enough and could be traumatic for them as survivors. Megan explained, "Starting in kindergarten and up there is a video they share. Pre-K it is not developmentally appropriate, really until you're in high school, but they show it." Abby confessed that she could not get the training video to work this year, and her students said, "It's fine. We've seen it. We get in the corner." When a police officer came in to make sure they had watched the video, Abby said, "We all say yes. It wasn't lying because we've watched it every single year. That's sad but true." Matthew said that the system schools have come up with for lockdown drills, of watching a video and talking about the steps to keep students safe, is not enough. Matthew concluded that the training and professional development teachers used to complete "is now just watch this video, training has gotten lax." Megan pointed out that as an early childhood teacher, she has never had any formal training for active shooters. The preschool teachers were invited to view the video that they would show the kindergarten and older students. Megan stated, "They let us stay or go, and I left. I didn't want to see it. I don't think they'd ever think it would happen in early childhood, but look at Sandy Hook and Uvalde. It can happen."

Some participants shared how experiences of seeing themselves in the video or reading about the Columbine shooting for educational purposes were traumatic for them as Columbine shooting survivors. Jamie shared that in her first year of teaching, a training video included footage of her and me (Michelle) running out of the building. She now lets any place where she works know that she is a Columbine survivor because "I will never get caught with my pants down again. That's why they know." She also always

asks her principal to reach out to the presenter to know what is in the material that will be presented because "I need to know what's in it because if I see myself that's, that's really upsetting to me to see my image used in a training way." Anne had the option of participating in an intruder drill run by local law enforcement when she was a graduate student and decided to attend. She described, "Slide two is pictures of our school, pictures of our classmates, he's telling the story. Even just now remembering it, I felt myself going into panic." She tried using calming techniques like deep breathing but ended up running out of the room wailing. Anne had a conversation with the police chief after this experience and said, "You cannot include these things. You do not need to give textbook examples. You just need to talk about what to do if something happens here in this setting." Louisa said that learning about school shooting prevention during preservice teacher training would have been "horribly traumatizing as a survivor." She explained, "In my mind, I think it couldn't have been prevented, I need to believe that, to maintain." But she did have to "read about us in textbooks, or it came up in college. I hated that. It was horrible. I think it should be addressed, but I wouldn't know how." In contrast, Claire felt that learning about Eric and Dylan in a recent education class was actually helpful for her as a survivor. She remarked that her professor "really talked about the child as a whole, and went into a bit of the psychology of children. She brought up Eric and Dylan in our first class. Totally random things like that happen." While it was not traumatizing for Claire, the point that she made about it being random is important to note. Survivors of the Columbine shooting are often presented with the shooting when they are not expecting it.

Autoethnography

I did not realize there is a narrative that has emerged surrounding "the video" that many participants had watched for their active shooting training. I do not have memories of watching many videos. I did get an email with no explanation for ALICE training, and was quite surprised to have entered an active shooting training with no preparation or warning. Other trainings do not include horrible videos or pictures of the emergencies. Fire drills do not include videos of school fires with children on fire or running for their lives. Suicide prevention training does not include photos of people who have died by suicide or in the act of taking their lives. Even writing this sounds ridiculous, yet we continue to subject survivors to training that includes images of themselves being used in educational settings in an unnecessary, traumatic, and unkind way. I hope that this project will bring awareness to this issue because I do not think people are trying to be traumatizing and unkind, but education around this issue is needed. Survivors' voices must be heard and honored surrounding this topic. I recently

participated in a school safety RJ panel with a colleague I admire in the field. When he sent me his slides for the presentation, I was shocked to see the photo of Eric and Dylan in the cafeteria with guns which is used ubiquitously all over the internet in connection with the Columbine High School massacre. I emailed him asking if we could talk about his slides only after agonizing over how to say it without offending him. However, I have realized from writing this book that it is not my responsibility to not offend non-survivors. It is my responsibility to educate non-survivors about best practices for school safety that are survivor-sensitive. Even well-meaning people working in the field of school safety and school shooting prevention do not have a survivor's perspective and may not know if something is offensive or traumatizing unless we say something. So I am saying something with this book. My colleague knew immediately what my concern was with his slides and apologized and removed the image. Shock value is not necessary or helpful when talking about school shooting prevention.

"Luck Where You Are"

A few participants discussed the limitations of any lockdown drill or training video and the randomness of many school shootings. Rachel told a friend with children, "What you should do is not be in the place where you will be in danger. That's what you should do." Her friend's daughter was having trouble sleeping and waking up asking questions about where she would hide and what she should do in a school shooting. Rachel's advice to the parents was, "You should tell her that she doesn't have any control of where it starts or where she is when it starts. And that's the thing that's going to help or not help." Abby also spoke about how location is important in a person's survival in a school shooting and the lack of control people have over that aspect. Abby said:

> In an actual scenario, honestly, it's luck where you are. You can think about where to hide, but there's not a perfect scenario for a person in the wrong place at the wrong time. Those videos sometimes put the blame on the teachers or the kids, and that infuriates me.

Autoethnography

I resonated with the participants who honestly shared about the luck of where you are during an active shooting at a school. I am crying as I write this section because I believe I am alive today because of not being in the wrong place at the wrong time on April 20, 1999, and that overwhelms me at times. Shortly after the shooting, when we learned who had been killed and injured, I realized that everyone who sat in my row in AP English had been

shot or killed except for me, because they were all close friends and spent their lunch together in the library. As Abby and Rachel said, we do not have control over where a school shooting starts or our location. The training and videos, and media stories put responsibility and blame on teachers to prevent deaths during school shootings, but that infuriates me and should not happen anymore. I am glad my participants used expletives in their quotes because that is what I would like to say. It has not been acceptable to blame victims of other violence or assault for many years, but it is still acceptable and commonplace to blame teachers for not locking their doors or for not being in a safe place during a school shooting. That is not ok. I am calling it out and will not stand for it anymore.

Arming Teachers is Laughable and Dangerous

None of the participants thought that arming teachers was a good idea or a solution to the problem, but two would consider it with certain safety measures and lots of training for teachers. Participants gave initial emotional reactions and then explained their responses.

The participants gave strong emotional responses to the question of arming teachers. Abby and Matthew audibly laughed when I asked about arming teachers. Abby said, "I don't think it would work. It's humorous to me. It feels more stressful to me." Matthew laughed, "That is the absolute worst idea I've ever heard in my life." Many others had very strong negative reactions to the question. Theresa stated, "I could go on forever about this one. I've always said, the day I'm in a school where teachers are armed, I'll quit teaching. I absolutely don't think teachers should be armed, not even a little bit." Goldie said skeptically, "I think it's a terrible idea." Anne announced, "I think it's awful, and it should not happen. I think guns in the classroom are a bad plan." Claire declared, "I think that's terrifying. I don't like that … It's very alarming to think about something like that happening. I absolutely disagree with that wholeheartedly." Jamie's response to teachers being armed was, "I don't think that teachers should be armed. I see problems with that on lots of levels." Like Theresa, she declared, "If I were asked to carry a gun, I would quit … I would never ever work in a building where I had to have a gun." Louisa commented, "This is actually separate from my experience as a school shooting survivor. I don't think teachers should be armed." Rachel took it a step further declaring, "I don't think the police should be armed." Megan and Elizabeth were not as staunchly against arming teachers as the other participants. Megan explained, "I don't know if it's a smart choice in a classroom without a lot of safety. I'm not against teachers being armed if teachers want to be." But personally, Megan shared, "I'm not against guns. I'm scared to death of them … I would not be armed." Elizabeth shared, "In terms of a teacher being armed. I feel mixed emotions about it."

Several participants followed up their responses about arming teachers with explanations and reasons about the dangers in the classroom. Unlike Rachel, who does not want police to be armed, Abby shared, "I've been raised with police officers, so it's not strange. Teachers with guns seems like a terrible idea to me, there are kids around." Matthew talked about people wanting to carry guns to feel safe, which he acknowledged, "There shouldn't be anywhere you go in this world where you don't feel safe. That's a fundamental human right. But they also want to be a hero." He hypothesized that if a situation occurred in a school with armed teachers, 20 teachers might try to "defuse the situation," and a "bad situation just got worse." He brought up another reason he was against arming teachers, stating, "If a kid knows where guns are, you're asking for a disaster. There's nothing about that that makes me feel safe." Like Matthew, Anne has some understanding for people who think arming teachers is a solution to school shootings. She stated, "Yes in theory, but people who haven't spent substantial time in a classroom, might not understand how classrooms can be. I don't think you're insane for having that idea." Anne expounded on the nature of classrooms, "Classrooms are hard places sometimes, weird unexpected things happen. No matter how secure it is, no matter how well-trained the teacher is." Theresa warned:

> I would never feel safe with teachers armed, with a gun in a classroom, more guns is not the solution. Arming teachers is not the solution. I see so many dangers. I think if we arm teachers, we'd see so many more shootings, injuries, and accidents. I can't even imagine how that would work.

Goldie stated, "I don't like conceal and carry on your hip if a kid bumped into you or grabbed it." Claire mentioned how their new curriculum for preschool includes learning to iron patches on clothes. She sees her classroom environment as unsafe even for an iron, stating, "No way I can bring a hot iron into my classroom."

Some participants talked about what kind of training teachers would have to be armed. Elizabeth shared, "Honestly, I feel like if it could keep kids safe and the teacher was truly trained and capable of doing it, then I don't know that I'm against it anymore." Jamie remarked, "My experience with training teachers is let's watch this webinar. What kind of training are you going to give, or are you going to say here's a gun, have at it?" Megan commented, "I think it's a lot to ask of a teacher. But a lot of training would make it safer and more effective."

Another reason some participants gave for not wanting to arm teachers is the inability to know how stress and trauma will affect a person's thinking and physiological reactions. Goldie reasoned, "I don't think people make the best decisions under stress." Megan explained,

> I don't know if I would make the right choices in that situation … I don't think you'd know what your body will do in trauma. I have been through two major traumas, and my body reacted differently in both.

A few participants questioned the character of teachers. Jamie stated, "There are good and bad teachers. There are colleagues I don't think should have a gun." Goldie acknowledged, "I would love to say all teachers are responsible, but they're not. There are teachers that sleep with students. They make dumb decisions." Louisa mused, "We've all met teachers, some of them are power-hungry. Some of them are teachers because they want power." Her initial response to the question was that she does not believe teachers should be armed "because they already have too much power. If you give them that kind of power, I think only bad things can happen." Louisa expounded on this idea, "I'm constantly having the discussion with myself. How white saviory am I? How is this impacting my thinking? Arming teachers, white teachers in black and brown spaces, I would say no." When asked about arming teachers in homogeneous settings, Louisa still believed, "No, I think the reason just might be different."

Two participants specifically responded to this question as parents, and what they would want for their own children's safety. Elizabeth still felt mixed emotions about a teacher being armed, but reflected:

> I was always absolutely no way I don't think teachers should be armed. But now that I have my own children, and I see all these shootings happening, it would honestly make me feel better if it was a trained professional, you know, like a police officer, someone at the door at the front.

Anne clearly stated, "I would not want my child in a classroom where a teacher is armed."

Abby and Rachel talked about the idea of feeling safe with guns present. Abby remembered a time in college when she went to a movie with people, and someone had a weapon concealed. She reminisced, "I felt scared, I didn't feel better." Rachel took a poll of her university students from Louisiana if they had ever been in a situation where they felt safer because someone had a gun. About half of the students and Rachel had felt safer in a situation where someone had a gun. Rachel stated, "I've been in a place where I'm like well, that guy has a gun that seems like a good idea." Then she asked, "How many people felt less safe because they knew somebody else could have a gun, and that was everybody."

Autoethnography

I was amused that participants laughed when I asked about arming teachers because some of us laughed about it together right after our shooting in 1999,

when it was suggested then. I talked to my best friend Clara about some of our teachers and what a horrible idea it would be to arm them due to their flightiness. The fact that this is still a conversation and has moved to implementation is beyond comprehension for me. Like all the participants, I do not think you can solve a gun problem with more guns. It is ludicrous. The participants said all the things I believe. Classrooms are strange places. There is not enough training that would make it safe. And like Rachel, I do not believe the police should be armed. But I would also like to add something to the conversation. When we ask a teacher to be armed, what we are really doing is asking them to potentially shoot one of their own students. This is not the role of a teacher, and it is unthinkable for me as a teacher, even when put in the hypothesis of saving other students' lives. If our solution to school shootings is arming teachers, we have not done the more difficult work of preventing school shootings.

Take Our Advice, We Know What We're Talking About

While most participants have not been asked to give input on school shooting safety policies or practices, the majority have given their opinions at their schools. Some participants took the initiative to give their input on safety presentations conducted at their schools or places of work. Goldie shared, "I can and have provided input during training. Some of my suggestions have been heard. Admin and some of my staff are aware I went to Columbine." Rachel's school opted to change their active shooter drill to online training and sent a message that said that it could be triggering. She wrote the police chief, the head of preparation, and the head of student affairs explaining that if they "have a training that is not designed for everyone, then there needs to be an inclusive option, so that people can stay safe without watching some terrible video where the stick figures go under the desk." Jamie had training the day before our first interview at her new place of work. She asserted, "I was very loudly giving input on what they asked us to do yesterday. I gave feedback to the presenters: No one is going to do what you're saying to do." The presenter's recommendation was to keep all doors locked at all times, but Jamie explained that the employees do not have keys to any of the doors. Jamie's reaction to this was, "It doesn't make sense." After having a traumatic experience with a training in graduate school, seeing pictures of the Columbine shooting, Anne had a conversation with the police chief about not using images of school shootings in their training. Louisa continues to advocate for the use of the I Love You Guys standard safety protocol in her school, but said, "It's been an uphill battle at my school just to allow that presentation to happen." She added, "I have to advocate for it. I'm currently advocating for it. I have been advocating for the past many years for changes in the protocol … I'll keep trying, but I'm losing momentum."

Megan argued with the head of security about the plan he had for her during an active shooting, letting him know that she would not "take my walkies and go in front of the front door where you would expect the shooters to be. I said no I have a door, and I am going to go this way." Megan took education classes last year. They did not talk about what teachers should do during an active shooting in their own classrooms. Megan commented, "I tried to bring it up in one of the classes … I brought up that I'm a Columbine survivor. It got real shut down by the professors." In a safety briefing last year, when Claire was new to her school, she inquired about special training for the office staff due to many of the perpetrators of school shootings going through the front door. She shared, "No one knew my background. They all thought I was crazy." When the lead secretary said that she knows everyone, and "the principal stood up and said 'we've got it covered,'" Claire pointed out that at the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, the shooter buzzed and the secretary let him in because she knew him. She concluded, "It's just real to us, and it isn't, even now, to so many people." Even though Jamie's school knows that she is a Columbine survivor, that knowledge has been used against her when she has given her input on safety. She stated, "One boss in particular when I'd raise concerns, they'd say you're not being rational right now. That's the perspective of a survivor."

Autoethnography

I was not expecting this theme to emerge. I had not thought about schools taking the advice of school shooting survivors until I was collecting data. As I heard from participants about times they have given their opinions about training, drills, or school safety, I realized that I have done some of this as well. I have not been asked to give input except for the day after the Uvalde shooting. When one of my schools talked about letting people we know through the side doors instead of entering through the front door, I raised concerns about this. All the new safety features that they wanted to use to feel safer, such as the glass-breaking tool, seemed silly in comparison to not letting people through the side doors to me, as a survivor. While writing this book, I have been speaking up about the research on school shooting prevention, but until people want to talk about changing gun laws, I do not have much else to add other than the best practices already mentioned.

In New Zealand, school safety is so different, but I have already given my input on a specific situation. A child in my class has a father who was recently released from prison for violence against his family. He has supervised access to his son and has been spending time on the turf near the school, where our students are allowed to play. On a teacher training day, my principal passed around his photo and explained the situation. I inquired about the lockdown procedures at the school. There was some discussion about the procedure.

They talked about using the intercom and WhatsApp to communicate. The intercom is not considered a best practice in the United States, and I think I will have further conversations with my current school. Although the risk of a school shooting is much less in New Zealand, I believe my experience and perspective on school safety have a place in my new context.

In the United States

Although participants make decisions in their own classrooms to create a safer environment and give input on their school safety policies and procedures, a few recognize the need for national-level policies to see a decrease in school shootings. Matthew and Anne talked about the choice we have made to allow school shootings to continue by not addressing gun reform. Matthew declared, "This is the life we have chosen for ourselves, the society we have chosen for ourselves. We have gotten to a point in our country where we value our guns more than our own children's lives." Anne's high school for pregnant and parenting teenagers had a real lockdown during a family activity on campus with children and babies present. She lamented, "It felt like an alternate reality. What world do we live in where we're hunched over with our babies, all of us mothers, and pregnant people?" For both of them, only national policies on gun reform will address this issue. Anne reasoned, "What we need is for these decisions to not be in the hands of teachers and administrators, and for it to be national policy. National policy on smart protective gun measures." Matthew cried out,

> I think about Sandy Hook, Uvalde, elementary schools, people who are vulnerable, and then our country doing absolutely nothing … We have gotten to a point in our country where we value our guns more than our own children's lives.

For him, the solution would be to fundamentally change the Constitution, taking it further than Anne's recommendation. Matthew proclaimed, "I will celebrate the day the Second Amendment is repealed." Rachel summed up the data from the participants, recognizing the lack of control they have over their own safety and preventing a school shooting when she stated, "Emotionally, my response as a teacher is to take ownership of the only part of it that I do have control over, which is like paying attention to what students write in class."

Autoethnography

All I need to say in this section is that I agree with Matthew. "I will celebrate the day the Second Amendment is repealed." "This is the life we have chosen

for ourselves," and I can no longer choose that life for myself or my own children. But I recognize that removing all the guns without addressing the culture of violence will not immediately end the violence. But it will be almost impossible to end school shootings without first removing access to guns.

Discussion

As evidenced by this chapter, the participants had a range of ideas and thoughts on what schools should do to prepare for active shooters and what teachers should be taught to prevent school shootings. Participants spoke about three spheres of influence: in their own classroom, in their school, and in the United States.

It is interesting that the best practices brought forward by participants for teachers to know and use are the same that the teachers in 1999 would have been using: mandatory reporting and being aware of mental health concerns. While the Columbine shooting demonstrated a greater need for vigilance by teachers to the well-being of their students and having resources available, these measures were already in place and being utilized to some extent. Eric and Dylan both presented warning signs that indicated something was amiss, and teachers followed the protocol of the day. There were concerns about them in elementary school. Jamie shared that the teacher she did her student teaching with had Eric as a student in fourth grade, and "they had concerns about his mental health" even then. While mental health awareness and services were not sufficient, they were utilized. In recent cases of school shootings, both mental health and red flags were addressed without being able to prevent the shooting from happening. As evidenced by the data, participants recognize the limited control they have over anything other than their classroom and how they interact with their students. While being aware of students' mental health and students exhibiting signs of distress is a foundational aspect of being a teacher, the research shows that participants think it is too much to expect that teachers can prevent school shootings and should not be expected to face the risk of school shootings in their classrooms.

The research put forward in this book also demonstrates the need for schools to engage in conversations with their teachers about safety and what is leading to school shootings. Goldie expressed, "We need to have deeper conversations about school shootings and how they impact people" desiring police officers and administrators to be "willing to have conversations with teachers about how safe they feel." However, Jamie was frustrated with the conversations in her workplace around school safety and felt unsafe. This demonstrates another aspect highlighted in this book, of participants wanting to share their experience and knowledge about school safety and have it valued and implemented. School shooting survivors are a source of

knowledge and recommendations for best practices about school safety. The research showed that participants took it upon themselves to make themselves and their schools safer by offering suggestions and recommendations.

Most participants recognized the continued need for a type of lockdown drill that allows teachers and students to know where to go and what to do in the case of an active shooter. The need for a standard protocol that allows school personnel and law enforcement to respond in an agreed-upon manner was suggested by the data. Another important aspect to include with active shooter training is focusing on the specific context and space instead of a broad hypothetical scenario that encompasses all scenarios and spaces. The data suggest that preschools and universities might need to have a standard protocol for an active shooter that is known and practiced by students and staff, since school shootings have happened with both very young students and on college campuses. The research shows that participants do not support the use of live-action drills. It was evident that showing a training video is considered both insufficient and potentially traumatic. Participants do not condone the use of their images for educational training purposes and find it deeply traumatizing to see themselves and their friends on the day of the shooting for training purposes. This suggests that schools need to adopt survivor-sensitive best practices surrounding lockdown drills and protocols, and the training material they use.

This research is very clear on the use of arming teachers to prevent school shootings. Participants were overwhelmingly against its effectiveness and saw it as making classrooms more dangerous. While some research shows that there are teachers who support arming teachers, and some Columbine survivors have spoken out in support of arming teachers, this research shows that these Columbine survivors, who are also teachers, do not support arming teachers. The research nuanced the discussion in important ways. It is important to note what Louisa pointed out about teachers already holding a lot of power in the classroom, which can lead to a negative school environment, which is correlated with school shootings. Giving teachers lethal power only makes the power imbalance much more severe, especially when teachers are White and teaching minority students. Also apparent in the research was the effect parenting had on influencing how some participants viewed this question. Both Elizabeth and Anne spoke about their feelings about their own children's teachers being armed. The combined experience of both surviving a school shooting and being a teacher is an important voice in the conversation about arming teachers.

The data yielded many suggestions for best practices for school safety regarding school shootings. But the question of how much teachers can really do remains if national policies are not enacted for gun reform. Another question is why schools do not value the experience and recommendations of school shooting survivors and label them as not rational or a survivor's

perspective? A survivor's perspective is an important piece to helping prevent school shootings. The issue of blaming the victims needs to be highlighted and addressed. As evidenced by the research, there is an element of luck when it comes to surviving a school shooting, and even if a teacher did not follow the protocol correctly, it is unacceptable to blame a teacher for the injuries or deaths that occur.

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7 How the Experience of a School Shooting Trauma Influences How Teachers Build Relationships with Students

The experience of surviving the Columbine shooting influenced how participants build relationships with their students around themes of classroom culture, vulnerability, RPs, boundaries, and warning signs. The participants in this book offer a perspective on student–teacher relationships not shared by the majority of teachers. It is worth giving voice to their experiences as school shooting survivors who chose to teach and how that has affected their relationships with students.

Classroom Culture

While participants did not use the phrase classroom culture when describing the importance of relationships and how they build them, this was the concept they described: prioritizing relationships, honoring student voices and "seeing" students, and accepting, including, and welcoming, SEL, and trauma-informed instruction.

Prioritizing Relationships

The data show that many participants view relationships as fundamental for teaching and learning. Anne said about the role between teachers and students, "It's everything. I don't think anything happens in the classroom without it. It was always my priority (as a teacher), and it still is in my work now." Theresa shared, "That's my ultimate goal, to build good relationships with students." She also spoke about the influence of the shooting on the relationships she has with students, reflecting, "It's just impacted so many areas of my life. When I teach, the way I interact with students. I want to be there for them like my teachers for me." A few participants expounded on the relationship between teachers and students as one of academic learning, along with care. Goldie said that she focuses on "sharing the love of learning, growing together, building relationships, mutual respect and kindness." Jamie remarked, "Getting kids to be vulnerable about what they understand and don't

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understand requires a relationship. You're with these little humans more than their family, you function like a family, and they need to know that you care about them." Claire added, "My job being the teacher is to lay the foundations for these kids, to want to come back, want to learn … Laying those seeds to help those kids flourish in the best way they can." Louisa commented:

> My philosophy of teaching is really focused on relationships in that that is your primary job. You build relationships with these young people. That's what's going to make the most difference, and you hope that they learn stuff along the way.

Abby and Elizabeth saw the role of their relationships with students differently depending on the home life of their students. When she taught lower-level math courses, Abby explained that some of her students "were bad at math, or unmotivated, or had a bad home life. I had a lot of side conversations to see what I could do to help them." In her current job at an academically rigorous school, she said some of her students will go to MIT and, "They'll be successful in whatever teacher they have … I see my job as an educator, a little bit of a mentor with thinking about their future, an encourager, and a motivator." Elizabeth thought,

> Depending on the type of school and community the role shifts some. When I taught in the inner city it was definitely more mental support, and make sure you have breakfast and make sure you have a coat and let you know you're in a safe place emotionally.

She said that when she taught in more affluent areas, the relationship between teachers and students "felt more education based. I mean, yeah, support in relationships, too, but less so those basic needs." All the participants saw their relationships with their students as an important aspect of teaching, but Abby shared an important counterpoint, remarking that her relationship with students "has changed for me in my teaching career of 18 years. I definitely think my job is to teach math, I focus on that. In my 20's much more of a mentor to kids."

Autoethnography

I have always thought of myself as a teacher who values relationships with my students. I believe the research that students learn from people they know care about them, and I work to show my students that I care for them. When I taught at the university level, I memorized my students' names, conducted Spanish interviews that allowed me to learn more about them as individuals, and was available for office hours. As a primary teacher, I smiled a lot and was questioned by a student once as to why I smiled so much.

I wanted my students to know that I enjoyed being with them. As a bilingual kindergarten teacher, I knew my students' academic needs very well and worked to help them be academically successful. I also talked about us as a team, calling us Porter People and ending the day with dance parties. All teachers have relationships with their students, but some of them are healthier and more productive than others.

When I moved to New Zealand last year and began teaching primary school, I questioned if I had ever prioritized relationships with my students in the United States. I realized that when I taught kindergarten, I barely knew about my students' families and outside interests. The intense curriculum I was required to use each day left very little time for conversations and play. But I reflected that I knew their academic needs very well and always advocated for them and what would help them the most. I did individual assessments for the math tests in each unit because my students failed when I led it whole class. In my current primary position in New Zealand, we used play-based learning along with teaching reading, writing, and math. I find myself struggling to engage in free play with the students instead of wandering around monitoring and assessing like I am used to. During play times when I am on duty, I hover on the outskirts and am only just beginning to learn how to engage with the students in nonacademic ways. I find that the difference in relationships also extends to my colleagues. In the United States, we were always separated by age groups or subjects taught. If I had interactions with colleagues, they were usually brief. In New Zealand, we have tea time at 10:30 every morning. Lunch is a longer block than I was used to in the United States. All the teachers and staff, including the principal, have tea and lunch together. While time together does not guarantee deeper relationships, it does allow for them to happen.

While I valued relationships with my students in the United States, there were always other types of systems and behavior plans in place that I could lean on when interacting with them. I knew that I could move a student's name to a warning or loss of a privilege if I did not get the behavior I wanted. With older students, I could threaten them with grades or detention. In one of my teaching positions in New Zealand, we did not have a specific behavior plan, I did not read a student handbook delineating the consequences for various behaviors, and some days I felt completely overwhelmed. Although I thought I prioritized the relationships I built with my students, I realized that I always had some system of control or some little threat that I could rely on to get the desired behavior from my students. In the new position, the foundation of what I did with my students and in the classroom was based on the philosophy of building relationships first. That was the school-wide model. It was challenging and rewarding, and I enjoyed getting better at it as I learned to really prioritize relationship building with my students as the basis for learning and their ability to flourish.

Honoring Student Voices and "Seeing" Students

Some participants talked about how they listen to their students and honor their voices. The idea of "seeing" their students was also important to a few participants. Goldie builds relationships of trust with her students by "being genuine and loving. Listening to what their needs are. Express themselves, not squandering or squashing that. Honoring their voice. Isn't that what we all really want?" As a high school teacher, Anne said, "I worked to build a culture where who they were mattered, writing and reading about things they cared about." Abby explained, "I think that I never make them feel stupid … I force them to take notes, I wait for them. I make it not a choice to participate in class. That lets them know that I see them." She and other participants also use humor with kids when building relationships and greet them at the door and interact with each student every day. Some other participants mentioned using humor to help make connections with students allows students to be seen and heard. Matthew has Terrible Joke Tuesday with his middle-school music students. He laughed, "Middle schoolers are not very funny. It's just an environment we can let our hair down. We can be silly with each other … The kids have fun and then have fun doing music." Rachel recognized that her students are often students of Color and from working backgrounds. In her classes, she works to include different voices and empower students to speak. For Rachel, this means, "Being aware of when I speak, being aware of my limits. My peak goal is to be a white lady who kind of gets it."

Autoethnography

I want my students to feel seen and heard in my class. It is my goal for them to know their strengths and weaknesses and to treat themselves and others with kindness. I want them to know that I care about them. If they tell me something, I validate their experiences and feelings. But sometimes I let my own experiences and lens of understanding the world affect how I hear and see my students. Recently, I thought I was supporting a young student who is exploring gender identity by addressing what I thought might be considered bullying in our class. When I followed up with his parents, they informed me that what I did lacked awareness and that their child did not feel heard. My first reaction was to be defensive and explain that I intended to support him and make sure that he felt safe in our class, but I did not convey these thoughts. Even though I wanted to see and hear this student, I failed. I apologized to the parents and the student and said that I wanted him to feel seen and safe in my class and was sorry that I did not make a safe space for him. I also shared with the parents my personal experience with surviving a school shooting and how that colors how I see situations and what I perceive

to be bullying. I also thanked them for educating me about their child and told them that as the mother of two children of Color, I too help educate others about my children and their needs. This experience helped me recognize that while it is my goal to see and hear all of my students all the time, sometimes I will fail. I will learn and do better as I learn more. One goal of this book is to help educate others on how to see and hear school shooting survivors and meet our needs in a way that is sensitive and caring for us.

Accepted, Included, and Welcomed

Making sure students feel included and accepted was a theme for many participants. Matthew shared that he takes the first few weeks to make the environment more welcoming by "making the kids feel human, comfortable, and a welcome environment." Anne also shared about a beginning-of-the-year practice to set up an inclusive environment with her students. She wrote them a letter on the first day of school, naming important details about her, including that she was a Columbine graduate and survivor. Anne explained that it was important for them to know that about her, "because it had a lot to do with what they could expect of me in the classroom, my belief about inclusion, the type of classroom we were going to foster, every one of them is needed." Rachel's students know that she is a Columbine survivor, which helps create a safe place for some. Due to her experience, she explained, "I have a lot of experience with traumatized teenagers." The message Rachel has for her students is, "I will make you a space where you can go on every day, and know that it doesn't have to stop just because the whole world is a different place than you thought it was." Goldie creates a space where students are accepted, included, and welcomed by addressing bullying with her students. She worked with her sixth graders when she became aware of bullying. Goldie asked them, "Do you rest easy knowing that you hurt somebody or helped somebody? How do you feel at night?" She added, "Sometimes I just want to be the art teacher, but I can't stand for that stuff, you know." Louisa's own experience as a student influenced her desire to include people. She shared that she was a middle child who felt like nobody noticed her, but recognized "it was probably in my head." Louisa added that she "actively tried to fly under the radar and wasn't close to any teachers." She reflected, "I seek out those kids now in my practice." Louisa recognized that this was always part of her personality but also influenced by surviving the shooting commenting, "Something that I wanted to go into teaching for was so that kids who maybe didn't feel important, would feel valued, and that they were, I keep saying the word important, I guess." To the interview, she also brought a picture of a quote from her senior yearbook signed by her Columbine English teacher shortly after the shooting, seen in Figure 7.1, encouraging her to go into teaching. While it took her a while to enter the profession, Louisa reflected, "I think it was always there but took a little bit longer."

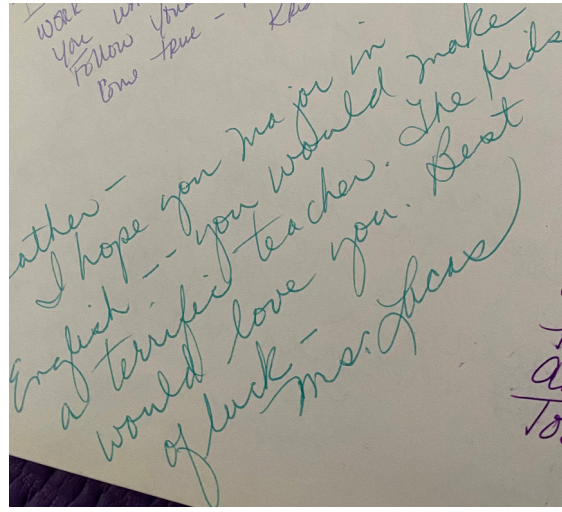

Figure 7.1 Louisa's Elicitation Item. Senior year yearbook quote from English teacher, 1999. Photograph by Louisa.

Autoethnography

I always want my students to feel part of the class and the learning. I have taught in many different contexts with different age groups and populations. At the beginning of working with a new group of students, I let them know some things about me personally and professionally. I work to create a welcoming environment where it is acceptable and encouraged for students to take risks academically and socially. I expect students to participate in and try all the activities. I talk a lot about the purpose of learning and the different activities we do, and the job of students to try things and learn in different ways. It is my goal for my students to be in the learning environment with their peers. I rarely have a student go to the principal's office for discipline because I think a student deserves to be in the learning environment and feel included and accepted.

Social-Emotional Learning

Both participants who taught preschoolers mentioned a specific need for more SEL with students. When Megan taught, she used a curriculum created after the Columbine shooting that incorporates dinosaur puppets to help children learn about their feelings. She explained, "It helps them learn to understand the feeling within their body. They won't have the words. The action that their body does is the feeling that their body is having. Tummy upset could mean sad, upset, or happy." Claire noticed, "Since COVID, my last two classes really need to learn how to play with other kids." She is there

"to tell them how others want to be treated, how I want to be treated." Goldie sees all the students for art at the elementary school where she teaches, and she too noticed a shift since COVID. She commented, "Especially after the pandemic, I'm teaching more life-based lessons, like how do you share, things that have been lost in the last few years. I've always had that philosophy, but it's gotten more so recently."

Autoethnography

All students need and deserve SEL at school. I did not learn much about feelings and self-regulation growing up, and would have benefited greatly from SEL at school. It is important for children to learn about their emotions, how to interact with others, and how to have and resolve conflicts. I really like the Choose Love Movement[1] curriculum created by Scarlett Lewis whose son Jesse was killed at the Sandy Hook School shooting on December 14, 2012. It is a great curriculum for the US context, but it does not work for my New Zealand classes, as I would have to introduce the concept of school shootings to most of my students for the curriculum to be relevant. I am currently teaching my five- and six-year-old students about what to do when their feelings get too big and explaining how this can happen with both positive and negative emotions. In a syndicate meeting with the other junior teachers, they suggested that I just work with a small group of specific students who struggle with anger and focus, and not take the whole class time for the SEL curriculum. I asserted that all children deserve SEL and that I was a very anxious child who performed very well at school and would not have been seen as a child who "needed" SEL but definitely did. My message was well received, and we are teaching all of our students SEL.

Trauma-informed Instruction

While trauma and how it affects participants was an overarching theme of this research project, a few participants talked about how they use awareness of trauma when establishing their classroom culture. Louisa commented, "When my students are going through it, whatever it is I can be compassionate." Megan explained, "The behavior of trauma kids I get, that's the first step I do, is try to build that relationship. If they don't trust me, there will be absolutely no learning." In her role at the seminary, Anne is working to add training on trauma-informed practices for the faculty and students. She sees an increased need for it due to the "mass trauma that everyone just has experienced through the pandemic and just an enormous amount of gun violence that everyone continues to experience on a regular basis, plus the political division." Megan expounded on what a trauma-informed classroom looked like for her as a preschool teacher. She had many students with

behavior disorders and trauma who would become violent toward her when they were upset. Megan shared:

> Doing the work that I do is scary as hell, and God forbid they turn and come. And I mean I've been threatened by pretty much every single one of them … But I don't know. I think, pushing these kids away and not treating them and understanding them and validating that they do have real feelings and getting them the help that they need is better than doing nothing, Maybe I just tell myself that to get myself to go back in the classroom. I don't know.

Autoethnography

Although trauma-informed instruction is vital in today's education system, I have not had any teacher training on it. All that I have learned is through my own research. I have had students over the years who I know have come from a traumatic background and used specific strategies with them. In my current setting, I know that I have students who come from homes with domestic violence and who are refugees. I would like to have more training in trauma-informed instruction to better attend to the needs of my students and how to effectively de-escalate situations. My trauma experience may help me be more empathetic and patient with my students, but I hope that humans do not need to experience trauma to be able to practice compassion. I believe it can be learned through listening and getting to know people without having to have a direct experience with trauma.

Vulnerability

All teachers choose how much of their personal story and life to share with their students and what level of vulnerability is comfortable for them. The same is true for the participants of this study, but they have an added layer of having a school-related trauma that is relevant to most schools in the United States today that practice lockdown drills. In general, Jamie believed that the age group of students she taught would benefit from her vulnerability. She commented, "At 12 they need to know a little about you, being vulnerable with them, very real with them, what I'm working on as a teacher." As a university professor, Rachel feels the need to have more boundaries with her vulnerability. She tells her students they are "entitled to this much attention from me" and uses pretty institutional language. Rachel added, "I do love them, and they know it." Louisa laughed, "I kind of make this joke a lot, but it's also serious. I get paid to embarrass myself in front of teenagers." She added, "I build relationships partly by being honest and

vulnerable, making mistakes, and showing them that people make mistakes. That is what it boils down to, being authentically honest."

While most participants told their administrators they are Columbine survivors, only some chose to share that part of their history with their students. Those who did tell their students saw it as a way of building relationships by being vulnerable. Jamie only disclosed to her students that she was a survivor "if there was an incident or if the kids seemed afraid." Rachel said that she manages her own vulnerability by making comments about her therapist during class in a "joke, non-joke" way, allowing students to know some about her personal life. She added, "I think there are students who have trusted me because I said I went to Columbine." Matthew stated,

> I share this quote with my kids anytime something awful has happened, the school says to monitor the kids … 'This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before' (Leonard Bernstein).[2]

He also tells his students, "This is the life we have chosen. I let the kids know I am a school shooting survivor. It never gets easier. It is really hard." Louisa shared that the population of students she works with can have trouble trusting adults. She originally disclosed that she is a Columbine survivor because she knew she would have to do emergency drills, "and I didn't know how I'd handle it. I told them because I didn't want them to fuck around. I didn't want to lose my shit because they were messing around. I wanted them to take it seriously." Louisa described "the unintended consequence" of her vulnerability being her students starting to share experiences with her from their own lives. Since her students know that she is a survivor, Louisa said that her students are usually the first to tell her when there has been another event. They ask, "Miss, have you seen the news? Oh, are you guys ok?" Louisa explained, "It's a trauma response for them. The population I serve, violence is part of their lives. It's a blip on their radar." With her high school students, Anne said:

> We would make space to talk about it … Because I would start with the letter at the beginning of the year, they would know this impact and I would feel it very deeply. I would talk about how I was feeling, and leave space for them to talk about feelings.

But she realized that she had not shared in her current work environment when she had an interaction with a student after the Club Q mass shooting in Colorado Springs on November 19, 2022. The shooting happened at an LGBTQ nightclub, and Anne asked a student who identifies as LGBTQIA+ how she and the larger community were doing. The student told Anne, "I'm fine. It didn't affect me more than something like this would affect you." Anne spent time reflecting on this comment and came to two conclusions: 1.

The student did not know Anne's experience of surviving a mass shooting. 2. "It was really hard she wasn't affected." As Anne discussed it with her husband, he told her that most people are numb and sad, and then go on when there is another mass shooting. She shared that he told her, "It's different for people who've been affected. Unless you're sharing it you're taking away a chance for people to have a little more empathy and a different response." Anne chose to follow up with the student and share her experience, telling the student, "I don't intend for that to be a secret, but it's hard to be in a constant sense of personal reflection." For Anne, "It was a reminder, sometimes through our own experiences and tragedies, we can be a pathway to helping other people understand."

Autoethnography

I have taught a wide range of age groups in a variety of settings. It is important to me that my students see me as a person with a life outside the classroom. I usually share a little bit about my family and show a few photos of my husband and two children. When I began fostering my children, I was teaching high school, and I shared some of my journey with my high school students. When I taught kindergarten, I wanted the children to know that I had areas of strength and weakness and areas I wanted to grow in. Some days, I would tell them that I had not had my best day and was grumpy. I wanted them to know that I was human. I believe that it helps the relationships I build with my students for me to be vulnerable and share some about my personal life.

I think I may have told my high school students that I survived the Columbine shooting, but I do not think I shared it with other students. As I reflect, it was probably due to minimizing my experience, wondering if it was appropriate to share, and feeling like it was irrelevant to my students' lives. A few years ago, I taught at a private primary school and had a group of sixth graders who needed a lot of work with SEL and kindness. I wanted to share some of my story and talk about bullying and relationships. My Head of School thought the parents would not approve and would not want their children to know about that kind of situation. They were exactly the children who needed to hear that message, but I did not share it with them. I taught primary school when I first moved to New Zealand, and did not share my survivor story with them. In 2024, I taught at a public all-girls secondary school in New Zealand and was asked by a senior criminology class to share my story with students who wanted to hear it. The students had thoughtful and sensitive questions that focused on aspects of being a student and a teenager. I also shared with a group of students who needed learning support and who did not have as much background with school shootings, but still showed care and sensitivity to what I shared with them. All of my employers have known that I am a survivor. Since moving to New Zealand, I contemplated not letting potential employers know that I am a survivor

when I was interviewed for teaching jobs. The context is so different in New Zealand, and I was concerned it might preclude me from getting the job or create distance with colleagues. I decided to share in all of my interviews because if a school is going to hold my survivor status against me, then it is not the right school for me.

Restorative Practices

I did not include a specific question about RPs because I did not want to influence the themes. A few participants talked about RPs either because they brought it up or because they asked about my research. Using RPs involves a level of vulnerability for both students and teachers. Goldie shared an experience of a lockdown with sixth graders that really upset her when they did not take it seriously and were loud. Her principal wanted to have a restorative circle with Goldie and the class to talk about how Goldie felt in that situation. Goldie is not a fan of the large group RP, but thought it did help in that situation. She prefers using RP for small groups commenting, "I think it teaches empathy, which I'm all for. Is empathy taught, or is it naturally in you? I don't know. Maybe a little of both." Anne used RP when she was an administrator at the school for parenting and pregnant teenagers, and all the teachers were trained in it. She valued it but recognized its limitations stating, "It made a difference. But if someone wanted to get in with a gun, they could." Rachel's story of using restorative circles in the gifted program class she had with Dylan in elementary school also speaks to the limitations of their ability to prevent school violence. She shared, "I seem to remember starting every class with a circle at least in third and fourth grade, likely some community building like saying positive things about each other or sharing out." Louisa shared that her district uses RPs and connective circles. She questioned why teachers need to be reminded to treat children well, which should just be expected. Louisa asked sarcastically, "Do I have to sit through another PD about why it's important to be nice to children?" She laughed, "People do need that, apparently." Louisa pointed out that equity has to address racism; the two cannot be separated. She concluded, "Circling all the way back to the same fucking PD every year, why you would be kind to children, or just be nice to people, humans in general … Just fucking be nice, don't be a dick."

Autoethnography

I value and use RPs in my classroom, but I have not had any formal training on RPs. I believe they are powerful ways of interacting with students and being in relationships together. I think they can help create better classroom and school environments, which may help prevent school shootings. But without a change in access to firearms, RP alone will not stop school shootings.

Boundaries

Two participants spoke about the need for boundaries in their relationships with students. Rachel and Abby both mentioned not being therapists and recognizing a distinction between the role of teachers and therapists. Rachel lets her students know what resources are available to them for mental health. Abby shared how she got to know students through them spending time in her classroom during their off periods and through coaching sports. She confessed, "Sometimes I honestly felt like I didn't get that training for that. I don't know if they should have been telling me the things they told me about." Abby did not feel prepared to handle some of the mental health situations that she encountered through her relationships with students. Early in Abby's career, one student was suicidal and told her. Abby stated, "I didn't have the training in teacher classes to handle that. She got help from an older teacher. Now I don't want to know students' personal stories. I want them to go to a trained mental health professional."

Rachel further explained the boundary of her teaching relationship as a "fiduciary relationship," meaning that the "teacher is ethically and legally required to put the student's needs first. The bounds of that are students learning the content and information." Rachel describes this teaching relationship as "firm, friendly, and fair, that everyone has access to me being nice to them." She sees the limited relationship as beneficial to her relationship with her students. Rachel commented, "I don't care about anything they do except their performance in my class. It makes for a real openness." She explained that by not needing to know why students missed her class, they do not feel the need to lie to her. Rachel commented, "I don't want them to lie to me. I'm not the priest, I don't want the kind of trust to be based on lies." Although there is a boundary, Rachel does care about her students' experiences outside of her classroom commenting, "I'm really practiced about how I weaponize my experiences to say that life is bigger than just school. These are the resources that are available if school and life are too much." Rachel reflected on how this boundary allows for "the unevenness of grief." She shared a story about a student who showed up to her class the day his father died, "Because what else was he going to do? But he struggled more later." For Rachel, this boundary of school being about learning creates a space that is available to all and always there. She stated, "The class happens regardless of grief. Your ability to participate might vary. School is available and there."

It is also important to recognize the teacher's role as a mandatory reporter of child abuse, harassment, and sexual harm when discussing the teacher–student relationship. When students visit Rachel's office, she informs them that she is a mandated reporter and asks them to leave the door open. This clarifies her role as a professor rather than a counselor—someone who can

provide academic support and encouragement and who can connect them with other resources. Rachel uses "boundaries to make a safe space" for her students and for herself.

Autoethnography

I have always wanted to know about my students and to hear about their lives outside the classroom, but I also directed students to the school counselor if I was concerned. I also did not feel the need for my students to think of me as a friend and a confidant. I wanted them to know I was human and approachable, but my role is to help them learn. I hope they know I cared about them. In the United States, I was careful to keep physical distance and be appropriate with my students. If kindergarten students needed help with their zippers or clothing, I encouraged them to do it themselves or had another teacher present if I were to help. When I taught college in the mid-2000s, I had a few students I really enjoyed having in class who wanted to be Facebook friends with me. My policy was not to be on social media with students.

In New Zealand, I find that boundaries are different but still exist. Teachers do give small hugs to students and provide more holistic care to students than in the United States. This is because we do not have a school counselor or a school nurse, or school lunches for that matter.

As I have completed this project, I have thought more philosophically about my role as a teacher and the boundaries that I have created. I feel uncomfortable with the narrative that some participants shared about doing whatever it takes to keep students safe. I do not see teaching as a role where my life should be on the line, but in the United States, it increasingly seemed like that might be required of me.

Warning Signs

All the participants follow warning signs when students exhibit behaviors they consider concerning. Some described it as a "gut feeling," while others talked about "red flags" and "mandatory reporting." Based on their experience of surviving the Columbine shooting, participants see their role as trying to prevent another Columbine by getting students the help they need. The categories that emerged were: mandatory reporting and mental health services, "gut feelings, warning signs, and red flags," and teachers can only do so much, including the Columbine teachers in 1999. These themes were included in Chapter 6 as well, since participants believe they are important practices for all teachers and schools to use to prevent school shootings. They are also themes that specifically relate to how the participants build relationships of care with their students.

Mandatory Reporting and Mental Health Services

Mandatory reporting refers to the legal obligation teachers have to report signs of abuse or neglect of a child. Along with the legal obligation of reporting concerns, many participants spoke about the need for access to mental health services for students. Theresa believed it is important to teach preservice teachers about the current laws surrounding school safety measures and taking care of students' mental health "is a big part of teaching, unfortunately." Similarly, Jamie stated, "Teach teachers about mandatory reporting, see something say something." Rachel emphasized the importance of an institution having clear expectations for mandatory reporting, especially in classes where students might share reflective writing. She stated, teachers "should be told if you are inviting reflections that, you are one of the people that students will tell if they're thinking about suicide, or they're thinking about hurting somebody else, and if they've been hurt." For her, this is so important that she does not think "people should be allowed into a classroom where there is significant reflective writing of any kind without totally clear ways of setting expectations for the students and for the institution about what the reporting requirements should be."

Most participants listed mental health services when asked about what to teach preservice teachers about school shooting prevention and the measures schools should take to prepare for active shooters. Some participants specifically spoke about getting mental health services for students they had concerns about. Matthew stated the need to "continually push for better mental health services, good social services. Make sure the kids have the resources they need." Abby commented, "I think the biggest prevention is identifying those kids early and getting them the resources or help that they need. Obviously, way before any violence happens."

Autoethnography

In the United States, I was aware that I was a mandatory reporter if I was suspicious of child abuse, but I was not always clear about my role in the process. When I had concerns about a student, I always reported it to the school counselor and my principal. They made reports, and I was never asked to make any official reports. Like some of the participants, I believe my experience of surviving a school shooting makes me more likely to notice and report suspicious behaviors such as drawings and writings, conversations, and dangerous play. I have had numerous students over the years who I had concerns about abuse being done to them or worried that they might be violent.

In New Zealand, there is no mandatory reporting law for teachers, but I continue to let my principal know about students I have concerns with and keep documentation. Unfortunately, there are not enough mental health services in New Zealand, and our school does not have a school counselor.

"Gut Feeling and Red Flags"

While participants agreed on the need for mandatory reporting and having access to mental health services, knowing exactly what to report is complicated and ambiguous for many participants. Abby and Elizabeth both used the phrase "gut feeling" when talking about what teachers could do to prevent school shootings. Abby listed concerning behaviors that she watches out for as "violent pictures, behavior, suicidal thoughts, lack of engagement with anger issues, a gut feeling if you have a sense for a kid." Elizabeth labeled concerning behaviors as "red flags" saying teachers should watch for "kids that are antisocial, not making eye contact, not having friendships or relationships, a gut feeling, … something's off, maybe not a great home life." Claire also used the phrase "red flags" when describing a school safety training she had at her school this year for school violence prevention. She explained that a former FBI agent who was involved in the aftermath of the Columbine shooting talked about psychology and "how teachers can look into these red flags and what we can do." Claire thought that teachers need to be aware of who their students are and what their role as a teacher is stating, "We are one of the first lines of defense as teachers to see these flags, to have these kids get help before it gets to a point where … (trailing off)." Matthew said schools "need to follow the warning signs." Matthew used the phrase "on the radar" to describe students whom teachers had concerns about. He suggested that it is not enough for teachers to have their eye on a kid or have them on the radar. Matthew recommended:

> If the kid is on the radar, follow up with that kid. Don't make them feel guilty. Don't make them feel exposed or anything like that, but make sure that they know they've got the resources to help them.

Louisa shared, "I've personally never studied a lot about prevention, that's intentional. In my mind, I think it couldn't have been prevented. I need to believe that, to maintain. I think it's important to learn about red flags, similar to suicide." Anne shared a story of seeing a red flag, seeking help, and how it went very poorly. As a student teacher, with the trauma of the Columbine shooting still being "very fresh," Anne had a student read what she thought was a suicide letter at the end of a creative writing class period. She tried to find the student, but he had already left. She talked to the vice principal about some of the other risk factors the student had, and they agreed she should call the police. Anne did not know the outcome of the situation until the boy's mother got Anne's home phone number and called her screaming that evening. The SWAT team had shown up at their home, where the boy was home alone and terrified. When Anne shared that she was worried the boy would kill himself, the mother's response was, "Of course he wouldn't." Anne

reflected that her experience as a survivor may have influenced how she understood that situation, questioning if someone else in a similar circumstance would have done what she did. She called it a "formative experience" and said the boy was mad at her for a long time. Anne concluded, "Even if teachers are doing threat assessment it doesn't always go well." Claire shared an example of how building a relationship with a student may provide opportunities for a teacher to see more red flag behaviors, but also know them more as they assess the risk of those behaviors. She shared about a preschool student with autism who exhibits some concerning behaviors such as using a "deep scary voice" and avoiding eye contact. While spending time playing alongside him, Claire gained some insight into his mental world as he played with the toy cars. She recognized that due to his neuro differences, "You can kind of see how that could evolve into misunderstandings." By building a relationship with him, she learned that there was more to him than she was seeing, and she could work with his parents to be involved with the "child's life, health, and well-being." But sometimes the red flags are not as evident. As Abby stated, "So often, the signs are so minor. You don't always know what kind of danger the kid is in. We're on higher alert." Matthew added, "Warning signs are very easy to miss. No one's going to give you the exact details."

Autoethnography

I could relate to the phrase "gut feelings" used by some participants to explain concerning behaviors that some students exhibited. I have seen many children engage in play that could be considered violent and use fingers for guns, but there have been a few students who concerned me in the amount and intensity of these types of games. Some children have written and drawn about death, and I do let parents know when it is a recurring theme. One kindergarten student used to tell me on certain days that he felt hot and angry in his eyes, and I often spoke with the school counselor about him. I currently have a five-year-old student who engages in inappropriate and sometimes violent ways of interacting with his friends, which is characteristically different from the aggressive play of his classmates. Red flags in the United States are different from New Zealand, where access to firearms is different. In the United States, if a student made a statement about a gun, it could result in suspension or expulsion regardless of intent, age, or access to the said firearm. In New Zealand, I had a student say he was going to make a gun and shoot me. There was no disciplinary action taken other than me saying I did not feel safe with that statement, and that he must be safe to stay in the classroom with me and the class. Even if I have a gut feeling or see a red flag with a student, access to mental health may not be possible. And as other participants mentioned, even if I know that a student is engaging in concerning or risky behavior, and we get them mental health services, that might not be enough.

Teachers Can Only Do So Much

While participants might agree that red flags and warning signs should be addressed, there was a common theme that teachers can only do so much. This theme extended to the discussion about what the Columbine teachers in 1999 could have done to prevent the shooting.

Abby said that even if a teacher has a concern with a student, "It's still hard to go tell someone that you think that their child might be violent, their child is cheating, anything you're trying to fix about their kid is difficult." She confessed, "In today's world, I'm more paranoid about saying anything wrong or offensive. I'm so glad I just teach math." But she shared that her school is looking to add mental health training for classroom teachers to lead students in discussions about topics such as "forgiving others" and "unhealthy dating relationships." Abby remarked, "I struggle with us not really being trained in that feeling like it's not my job like I didn't go into teaching to do that." Abby wants parents to be more involved with the mental health aspect of their children, stating, "I hope parents have a better feel for their children than teachers do." Claire felt at a loss for what teachers could do other than raise a concern with a parent commenting, "As a teacher, what more can you? … Then it's in the parent's hands."

Some participants believed that the Columbine teachers in 1999 did all that was expected of teachers to do when faced with concerning student behaviors and should not be blamed. Jamie believed that asking what Columbine teachers could have done to prevent the shooting was an unfair question explaining, "The Columbine question opened up the world's ideas to things happening in white America. It's super easy to look back with our 2020 eyes and judge." Matthew concurred stating, "I don't think much of anything at the time could really have been different. Teachers were expected to teach, weren't expected to do mental health …. The world has definitely changed a lot since then." Elizabeth said that if there were red flags at the time, maybe teachers could not have dismissed odd behaviors, but she reflected, "I don't think there's anything those teachers could have done to prevent it. Because Columbine was kind of the first of its kind, those red flags maybe seemed less like red flags than they would now." Matthew agreed, "The warning signs back then weren't the same ones now." Louisa reflected, "I am aware there were red flags and things that could have been done to prevent it. But I will never say that any teacher should have done anything that they didn't do." Claire felt the same stating, that teachers could have "if anything, possibly, tried to do a little more if they saw red flags." Anne commented, "Nobody could have imagined anything like that happening in Littleton in Columbine. It's hard to imagine an unimaginable outcome back then, but now it's an imaginable outcome. It feels too cruel to say they should have, could have." Megan concluded, "You can't blame a teacher unless they

(perpetrators) confess to a teacher, and they say go right ahead. I can't imagine in all of my years of education ever coming across a teacher who would do that."

Multiple participants referenced an English teacher who raised concerns about some violent writings Eric and Dylan turned in for her class. Theresa said, "In general, there are a lot of things in place in education for suspicious writing and drawing." And that's what some of the Columbine teachers did. But as Anne explained, "Eric or Dylan's English teacher had some writing that had warning signs. She reported it, but nobody would know what to do." Abby also mentioned that at least Dylan's mom had been told about a concerning essay based on the book *A Mother's Reckoning*, which Abby stated was a "pretty bold step for the teacher. A lot of teachers don't do that." Abby also pointed out that the Internet allows schools to now document a violent essay, allowing schools to be aware of a student displaying concerning behaviors, which did not exist in 1999. While they praised the teacher for taking this step, some participants also pointed out that students often write violent pieces. Matthew and Rachel both mentioned violent writing and guns. Matthew commented, "Kids write all kinds of things in their notebooks. They bought guns, people buy guns all the time." Rachel observed, "I know I talk my big game, teachers to be trained to report, but students write crazy stuff all the time, lots of ideation that never do it." She added that "the problem is guns" and that "all the factors that go into it, Eric and Dylan that day, had easy access to assault weapons." Rachel concluded that children having easy access to firearms "isn't under the control of the teacher."

While participants would not blame the teachers for the shooting, some spoke about areas of Columbine High School that needed improvement in 1999, such as addressing bullying and mental health services. Louisa expressed, "We're all aware that bullying happened at Columbine. We also know now that it's like a depressive suicidal kid combined with a psychopath" speaking about the perpetrators. Goldie remembered, "I saw some bullying in my time there. There were a couple of times where I wish the teachers would have stood up a little bit more." She told a story of a time in a math class when a student giving a math presentation was bullied by one of the more popular students, and Goldie said bitterly:

> The teacher sat in the back and didn't do a damn thing. I stood up and started yelling at him. It felt good for me to yell at him, but I wondered why the teacher didn't do anything. I think that's my job as a teacher.

Abby thought that the message of bullying as a cause for the Columbine shooting has gone too far in today's schools. She sees the term *inclusion* being used to address bullying by forcing children to like all the other

children. Abby believed we should teach children, "It's actually okay to not like people and to not be friends with people. But you need to be respectful and treat them with kindness." She added that she thinks schools have taken anti-bullying too far by requiring children to sit by children they may not want to spend time with. Abby defined inclusion as "You don't purposely leave someone out, or you don't treat someone poorly, but you don't have to sit next to the sixth-grade boy that says the f-word." Abby believes children need to learn healthy boundaries in relationships, and that teachers do not need to eradicate bullying by making all students be friends with each other.

Participants also spoke about the need for more awareness of mental health and getting services both for Eric and Dylan and for themselves and the general student body. Goldie believed that there were a lot of signs that Eric and Dylan were troubled and that the Columbine community was a "naive, suburban neighborhood." Goldie thought some of the home behaviors should not have been ignored, such as the videos of shooting guns and their journals. Jamie agreed, "I have to assume our teachers had elevated the concerns. I just wish our school had pushed a little harder to get mental health support for those two students." But even with known risky behaviors, Goldie acknowledged that back then, she saw the topic of mental health as "taboo," and she did not even talk about her own mental health in high school. She commented, "You were thought of as crazy if you mentioned how you were feeling." Abby reflected, "Our generation didn't get mental health. Don't show your feelings. Hold it in. Maybe cry to your mom at home. Not the norm to have therapy." She conjectured, "It's interesting with Eric and Dylan if we'd had mental health. I'm sure their parents were doing things, juvenile detention, that's what society did vs. therapy." Abby went as far as to say, "Sometimes even I see the perpetrators as victims in their own mental health demise. Unfortunately, we can't get them their mental health earlier on." She also speculated that parents can also feel overwhelmed with their children's mental health stating:

> My job is to teach algebra. I don't know how to deal with the mental side of it. I don't think parents do often time. It can get to the point where parents can know their kid is struggling, I think Eric's dad would have been willing to put him in a home. I think we need safe places to put kids, so many are messed up by first grade.

These comments support what was previously said about understanding school shootings as complex problems that reflect societal norms and problems.

Another aspect related to putting blame on the Columbine teachers came from participants' experience on the day of the shooting. Jamie declared

emphatically, "My teacher put her life on the line for me. I still don't know how she didn't get shot. At the moment, I couldn't have asked my teachers to have done anything else for me." Theresa commented, "I would never in a million years blame the teachers at all … I think the teachers were the heroes. I don't think they could have done anything else to prevent it." While a few participants were upset with how some teachers responded on the day of the shooting by not staying with them, this did not cause any participants to blame the teachers for the shooting. Megan recalled that one teacher left and one stayed. She commented, "I was angry at the fact that he would just take off … Now with mountains of therapy and understanding my feelings, it was just his fight or flight. It's what his body did."

One participant put the blame solely on the perpetrators while also acknowledging that some other people might have been able to do something different. Megan stated that she does not blame the teachers explaining, "I don't think the teachers could have done anything differently, others could have, their parents, and psychiatrists who worked with the leader." But even though she thinks they could have done something differently, she concluded that the perpetrator is ultimately to blame.

Autoethnography

I agreed with the participants that I can only do so much as a teacher. Parents play a huge role in their children's lives. Sometimes this is frustrating as a teacher, but as a parent, I count on that being true. I want to influence my children more than their teachers, even though I value what their teachers do. As a teacher, I pay attention to the mental health of my students and advocate for access to mental health services. But I am not a trained counselor and do not feel equipped to address mental health concerns myself. I also do not want to be expected to be everything to my students.

I also agreed with the participants who said it is not fair to judge the 1999 Columbine teachers about red flags that now seem so obvious. Teachers were not aware that something so horrible could be possible, and even today, most school shootings are not planned for as long and taken to the extent as the Columbine massacre.

Eric and Dylan's violent writings could have been taken more seriously, but knowing the other risky behaviors is what makes those pieces of writing seem so important in hindsight. As shared by other participants, children write and draw violent materials all the time. If there is no other concerning behavior, it is probably just a piece of writing or artwork. But if a child has other disturbing behaviors or exhibits other red flags, then those pieces take on more importance. A desire to act out violent writings is not present in all children who write violent pieces. And access to firearms is necessary to carry out a violent shooting.

Addressing bullying needed improvement at Columbine High School in 1999, but that did not cause a school shooting. Bullying is insidious and horrible and should not be ignored. But bullying is not an excuse for murder. The definition of awareness of bullying has also changed since the Columbine shooting; so, I would hope that teachers have a different understanding of and response to bullying now. This does not excuse my teachers from ignoring specific situations if that did occur, but I did not experience any personal bullying that I raised and was ignored.

Mental health definitely needed improvement at Columbine High School in 1999, but that was reflective of the time and context. I also felt similar to the participants who shared that therapy was not something you engaged in unless you had a serious mental condition. My parents did take me to therapy for a brief period when I was in fifth grade and my dad was activated to go to Desert Storm. I had very intense feelings and remember going to a therapist a few times, but do not remember anything we did. My undiagnosed anorexia nervosa was also not addressed with therapy, even though my parents could tell something was going on with me mentally. My dad referred to whatever mental demons I had and "threatened" to have me go to therapy if I did not get my eating behaviors under control. I told him that I did not need therapy, and that was the end of the conversation. Therapy was for extreme situations, such as your dad going to war, or a threat to control behaviors. It was not seen as a useful tool that everyone could benefit from.

On the day of the shooting, I was in a classroom with a teacher whom I had not had as a teacher and did not interact with before that day. While I could tell she was flustered and scared that day, she helped keep us safe and calm. I am grateful for her presence that day and for helping us stay safe. But I have never been upset with how teachers reacted that day. I understood it as trauma, and have been accepting of how teachers reacted to the trauma that day. That being said, I can also recognize how other participants may have experienced feelings of abandonment depending on their own experiences that day.

While recognizing the complex nature of school shootings and the societal problems they reflect, I believe that Eric and Dylan ultimately chose to carry out their murderous plot on April 20. They both probably had mental illnesses. They had a classmate purchase the weapons for them. But they set up bombs and walked into our school intending to kill all of us, all of their classmates and teachers. I do not understand why. But that was their intent.

Discussion

The data showed that participants prioritize relationships with their students, which may in part be due to surviving the Columbine shooting. The idea of trying to prevent another "Columbine" came through in the ways that participants

spoke about, including students, honoring their voices, and wanting them to feel welcome and included. Along with seeing their role as one of building relationships with students, the idea of boundaries in the relationships was also very strong. Participants saw an example of teachers literally losing their lives for their students. How do they then form relationships with students, knowing that that might be required of them or something they choose to do?

The research showed that some participants needed a clear understanding of the boundary in the relationship they have with students and see their role as an educator who cares about their students, but with limits. For some participants, the boundary of their relationship with students and administration allowed for vulnerability when sharing about surviving the Columbine shooting, while others did not freely share that experience. This is important to note because all schools should practice survivor-sensitive best practices because they may not be aware that there is a school shooting survivor student or teacher in their school.

Also evident in the research was the participants' keen awareness of warning signs and red flags in students. While participants watch out for warning signs, it seemed to be based on "gut feelings" when knowing if a student posed a threat to themselves or others. The participants recognized that even if a student displays warning signs, they can only do so much. Teachers can alert administrators and parents if they are concerned about a student and recommend mental health services. But those same strategies were used for Eric and Dylan, and the shooting still occurred. Just because a teacher sees something and says something does not mean it gets addressed or addressed productively. Police were contacted for a suicide concern in Anne's story, and a SWAT team was sent to handle what was considered to be a mental health concern. The mom was angry with Anne's handling of the situation. This story shows the complexity of handling school safety due to the possibility of guns being involved. Instead of sending a social worker or a counselor to speak to the 14-year-old boy, a SWAT team was sent because one might rationalize that weapons could be involved. The research supports the findings in the literature about the complex integrated ecologies of relationships inside and outside of the school. The research also highlighted that parents can only do so much as well. Abby suggested that group homes that provide support who are dealing with intense mental health issues might be required. She believed, "It can get to the point where parents can know their kid is struggling. I think Eric's dad would have been willing to put him in a home."

This leads to another point highlighted by the research: can we teach empathy and kindness? Once a teacher recognizes that a child is suffering from a mental health issue, what can be done? Some participants shared about their discussions with students about bullying or the use of RPs to help children be aware of other people's feelings and the impact of their actions on others. Louisa focused on teacher training on how to treat

children well, which is an important part of the conversation. Children and adults need to learn practices and ways of being to treat others well, even though it might be something that comes more naturally to some. Although the research points out the importance of building relationships based on care and teaching empathy, RP is not enough to prevent a school shooting. As Rachel pointed out, she and Dylan sat in circles together in elementary school, and yet "some of my friends killed some of my other friends."

The research definitively concludes that participants do not blame the 1999 Columbine teachers for the shooting, but recognized they made mistakes and did not handle every situation perfectly. Theresa shared, "That's the hard thing about teaching. You always second-guess yourself. Did I say the right thing to a kid? Even with unlocked doors. We're human. There are so many factors that go into school shootings." Regardless of the factors, participants did not blame the teachers for the Columbine shooting. While the media blamed bullying and lack of mental health services, that was not theirs to do. Participants have the right to speak about bullying and mental health services, but the media does not get to blame these factors for the attempted murder of all the participants and the murder of their classmates.

Two participants said they needed to provide more for students in low-income schools, focusing on providing basic needs and offering more mental and emotional support than in affluent schools. But the results of this research do not support that understanding of the role being different in affluent areas or where children are not from "bad homes." School shootings have happened at predominantly white schools, including Columbine. Although Abby was one of the participants who delineated her role based on the socio-economic situation of her students, she also pointed out that mental health awareness was not part of our upbringing. She does see it as more common among her students and friends now. But it is important not to assume children in wealthy families or who are academically strong might not need support. This also sees children from poverty or who are not in families that appear as strong with a deficit lens. This was what Louisa was referencing with her concern over being "white saviory," when White teachers feel like they need to "save" students of Color. When talking about school shootings, it is necessary to recognize that some schools in poor and minority areas may experience more gun violence in their neighborhoods, but as Louisa pointed out, when there was a shooting in the neighborhood outside the school, the students ran to the school for safety. She remarked about the possibility of a school shooting, "I'm not going to say it couldn't happen, but that's not my worry. We have kids, 'Oops I forgot my gun in my school bag.' It's a different type of violence that happens in that community." The focus of the conversation around school shootings needs to take into account the social ecologies surrounding the schools where they occur, and not shift to talking about students from minority and poverty needing more teacher support.

The research also concluded that many participants use a trauma-informed lens with their students in part due to their own trauma of surviving a school shooting. Being able to relate to students because of their own experiences is an important tool in building relationships. But it also highlights how difficult it can be for people to relate to another person's experience without having that same experience. The research suggests that participants do not want other people to be able to personally relate to the experience of surviving a school shooting, but by sharing their stories, others can learn how traumatic of an experience it is. Relating to another person's trauma through connecting to our own experiences of loss and grief is an important way of connecting as humans. While some of this trauma comes from outside the classroom, some participants also acknowledged that they experience trauma from their relationships with their students. Goldie's experience of students not taking a lockdown drill seriously led to a restorative circle to repair that harm. Megan's story about being threatened by all of her preschool students and how she thinks it's worth it to help those children, or at least that's what she tells herself to get back in the classroom, is powerful. Sometimes teachers and students share a trauma, such as a school shooting, which alters the relationships. The research showed that some participants do not trust the teachers they shared a space with on the day of the shooting, although they can understand it as a trauma response from those teachers. One participant who felt abandoned by a teacher is unable to be a student in a classroom setting, which highlights the depth of the relationship between a teacher and student and how powerful it can be. The research indicated that some participants saw their Columbine teachers as heroes on the day of the shooting, others felt abandoned by them, and all had changed relationships with teachers due to the shooting.

Questions remain about the degree to which surviving the Columbine shooting influenced how participants build relationships of trust with their students. During the data collection, I wondered with one participant if other teachers prioritize relationships in the same way we do. Did the shooting influence the value we put on relationships? Do we see building those relationships as a way to prevent a school shooting? These are important questions to consider in a future project.

Notes

1 More information about the Choose Love Movement can be found at https://chooselovemovement.org/.
2 Bernstein, L. (November 25 1963). *An artist's response to violence* [Speech to the United Jewish Appeal].

8 How Columbine Student Survivors Who Are Teachers Experience Trauma After Surviving a School Shooting

"Columbine is something I wear on my sleeves" (Jamie). How it did not affect us is the conclusion I came to on March 11, 2023, as I did more data analysis. Megan explained about the trauma of surviving the shooting, "It doesn't ever really go away, you just learn to live with it." Participants' lives have been shaped by and traumatized by this event. The data show that participants experience trauma professionally, personally, physically, and philosophically.

Professionally

As participants shared their experiences surviving the Columbine shooting and then becoming teachers, each spoke to ways that trauma influences their professional careers. Participants expressed a variety of ways that the trauma affects them professionally, which were organized into categories of the influence of the shooting on career decisions, organizing class around safety, and still experiencing the school setting as a traumatic space.

Career Decisions

While there was not a clear theme around how and why participants chose to be teachers, each one expressed a personal story about how they came to teach. Some participants felt similar to Elizabeth who stated, "I've always known I wanted to be a teacher … it's always been in me." Others made the decision to enter the profession after specific experiences, such as Anne, who majored in journalism in college and spent a summer at a camp working with high schoolers, where she describes, "Just my whole self started singing." One participant, Megan, even defined the decision to become a teacher in light of surviving the Columbine shooting declaring, "I've known well before our shooting that I wanted to be a teacher." Some participants definitively said that surviving a school shooting did not influence their decision to become a teacher. Goldie declared that the shooting did not influence her

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decision stating, "No, not at all. Didn't second guess it." Louisa reflected, "I don't think it did. I can't say. If it did, it wasn't consciously." Others spoke about how the shooting influenced how they imagined their role as a teacher when they made the decision to become a teacher. Abby explained, "Feeling like you could impact kids, feeling like you could help kids who are in need have a connection." Rachel shared, "The idea that education professors used to say students bring their baggage with them into the classroom. I could maybe connect with students who were bringing in a lot more baggage than they wanted to." Anne commented, "I think that it influenced the way that I thought and continue to think about people and communities and the importance of cultivating strong cultures." Matthew explained, "So something that I went into teaching trying to think about is, what could I do to change the culture? What could I do as a teacher to maybe make school a little bit more safe for those kids?" Some shared how surviving a school shooting "Made me kind of second guess for a brief moment" as stated by Elizabeth. Matthew declared, "It definitely factored into my choice … the unfortunate reality is that we have to live with it. The constant like this could happen any day of the week at any school."

While participants had different paths that led them to teach and were influenced to varying degrees by surviving a school shooting in their decision to teach, the narrative of school shootings at the time of the Columbine shooting did not exist. The school shooting narrative began with our school shooting and has expanded ever since. A few participants expressed this idea when sharing about the influence of the shooting on their career choice. When Elizabeth said that the shooting made her second-guess wanting to be a teacher, she added, "Second guessing probably because of fear … It felt like a one-time deal back then, unfortunately, it isn't." Goldie said she did not second-guess teaching as a profession because, "I guess in my head I pictured it as a rare thing, surviving a fire or flood, at least it's happened to me once, so my odds are slimmer now, saw it as a one-time thing."

If participants did not envision a world where school shootings would not only continue but increase immensely, the initial decision to enter teaching as a profession might not have been as influenced by the possibility of future school shootings as it is for teachers who currently enter teaching. But participants' continuing careers have been profoundly impacted by surviving a school shooting.

Autoethnography

As a child, I considered teaching, along with being an author and a veterinarian. The desire to do something "meaningful" was very influential to me. That equated to saving lives, so I thought I would be a doctor. But I chose the specialty that I thought would have less to do with death and crisis, an

OB-GYN, but I did not like being in hospitals and had a distrust for doctors due to an unfortunate interaction with my family and medical professionals at the beginning of my anorexia nervosa activation. So, I ended up choosing a profession that I understood, and a context where I felt safe and competent. But the feeling of safety was forever altered on April 20, 1999, and I ended up going into a profession that is increasingly asking teachers to save people's literal lives and not just the metaphorical phrase of "education saves lives." At the time, surviving the Columbine shooting did not influence my decision to become a teacher, but I felt conflicted about accepting a Dave Sanders Memorial Scholarship. As my teaching career has continued for the past 20 years, surviving the shooting has definitely influenced my career decisions. I moved to New Zealand in June 2022, in part because I no longer wanted to teach in the United States with school shootings as a daily reality.

Organizing Class Around Safety

Several participants talked about organizing their individual classrooms around physical safety. Jamie stated,

> I know some people set up their classrooms differently. I was in a temp. If I had fewer students and a bigger classroom, I would set up my room differently … I would naturally keep my doors locked as a teacher.

Matthew explained:

> Is the portion of our room clear of clutter, away from a window, I'm constantly thinking of that. Someone says we can put something there, nope, that's our safe spot. My personal experience has made me more vigilant about where we need to go to be safe, or where to run.

Megan commented, "I set up my classroom a little differently to protect the door, good sharp scissors by the door, a good leather belt if I needed to close the door. Some things a normal teacher might not do." Goldie shared how her personal experience of surviving a school shooting influenced how she viewed her classroom. She stated that her first classroom had glass windows facing the corridor that she painted to make it safer. Goldie also had conversations with her principal about what she planned to do for safety in her own classroom stating,

> I would tell my principal … I could push the kids on top of the kiln, and we'll get in the ceiling. She was like 'O my God, you can't do that.' Really, is what you're telling me to do the safest for my classroom?

Goldie's desire to keep her students safe based on her own personal experience was repeated by other participants.

For some participants, the focus is on emotional safety in their classrooms. Louisa said,

> My main goal is I want my students to feel safe in my room and with me, so kind of whatever that takes … I'm about emotional safety. That boils down to the relationships I build, the vulnerability I express, the honesty, and being authentic.

But she goes on to explain that due to her personal experience of surviving a school shooting, physical safety is also a part of safety for her. She stated,

> There obviously is a physical safety … This is where we're going to hide, this is the reason, this is where we're going to hide. If it helps me feel safe, I hope it helps them (my students) feel safe.

Jamie saw her role as keeping students safe both physically and emotionally, and was willing to put her own life at risk for her students. She shared what she told students, "My job is to keep you safe, emotionally, physically, like, I'm here to help keep you safe, and I'm going to do whatever I need to do to keep you safe." When a student asked if Jamie would get shot, she replied, "I probably am, and I'm ok with that. You book it (run fast) out."

While not all the participants explicitly shared a focus on physical or emotional safety in their classroom, this is an important theme to include because participants seemed to be aware that their personal experience of surviving a school shooting influenced this reaction in themselves.

Autoethnography

I organized my class around building relationships with my students and having them feel emotionally safe with me. While I tend to be an anxious person and think about safety a lot, this did not equate to setting up my classroom for physical safety. I did not keep my classroom door locked when I taught in the United States because I taught in buildings with locked front doors. In one training on lockdowns, we were given glass-shattering objects in case we were locked in the room and needed to escape through the window. It became a practice to think of all possible dangerous scenarios we might encounter in our classrooms. In the same training, the principal suggested that the children should never go to the hallway bathroom in case there was ever a lockdown. But I still let children use the bathroom outside our classroom. For me, the classroom was always a place that could be dangerous, but I was not willing to alter the physical space or change my daily

routines in a way that would make the learning environment less welcoming and comfortable. In the same training, we were told to keep the outside doors locked and for people to enter through the front door. Someone asked if we knew the person, could we just let them in through a side door, and my principal said yes. Only allowing people in the locked front door was the only safety feature I thought we should adopt, and it was the one thing that was said we could ignore. My idea of what was safe as a Columbine survivor was not the same as a non-survivor teacher, and sometimes it is not the same as the other participants in this project.

Still Experience the School Setting as a Traumatic Space

All the participants expressed the theme of still experiencing the school setting as a traumatic space based on surviving the Columbine shooting. Participants experience trauma related to school drills and active shooter training, when there has been another school shooting in the media, in less expected ways, dealing with school campuses, and being in another real lockdown.

Participants described trauma stemming from being part of lockdown drills or fire alarms in the school setting. The majority of participants had yearly training and participated in an active shooter drill, but Rachel and Megan did not. Rachel said she had no training as a university professor, and Megan said she received information on what to do but did not have formal training. The rest of the participants described a variety of drills, trainings, and videos that constituted their active shooter preparation. Abby recalled teaching at Columbine and participating in lockdown drills in the same building as the shooting. She felt like "they were almost trying to trick you." She missed the memo to not answer the door when they knocked during the drill, and when she opened the door, Principal "Mr. DeAngelis said, You could have killed everyone. They could have had a gun to my back." Abby said, "All the kids were like, ooo, I felt like that was traumatic, I felt mad." Rachel taught a course in a prison shortly after our interview, and she acknowledged that the regular lockdowns and alarms in a prison might be triggering for her while also recognizing that in a prison setting, "I'm probably the least traumatized person in the room." Abby added nuance to the experience of returning to teach at Columbine, adding, "I remember one Columbine teacher having a panic attack during one of the trainings. It feels retraumatizing honestly to the people who would have an emotional reaction to that." Some participants said administrators would give them advance warning about drills and invite them to see how drills are run while others said their districts said by law they were not allowed to know. Matthew expressed anger that the district assumed he would not take a drill seriously if he had advanced warning stating:

> If you let me know in advance, then I can be a little more effective in letting the kids know that this is only a drill.. and I can actually make that a teaching moment for the kids rather than act like a, you know, a panicked idiot trying to get the kids into a closet.

While the media and literature might rightly assume that lockdown drills can be traumatic for all people, this is especially true for school shooting survivors. As addressed in Chapter 6, participants spoke to the complex nature of lockdown drills and the necessity for preparing for school shootings. But a trauma that may not be known about is the effect of fire drills on survivors of the Columbine shooting. For the people at Columbine on April 20, 1999, a fire drill interrupted our day, alerting us to something out of the ordinary. For those who remained in the school building, the fire alarm sounded for hours before the end-of-day bell also started sounding. Louisa shared, "I went off to college, community college, fire drill in English class, lost my shit, completely blindsided by a trigger I didn't remember. I didn't remember the fire alarm going off." Matthew said,

> I still get anxiety from fire drills. I'm still going to do what it takes to keep the kids safe if a fire alarm goes off, and I don't know it's coming. I may be a mess, and I may be a mess the rest of the day.

Rachel shared a similar experience stating, "Early in my teaching I had to stop class for fire drills … Moments, many ways for the class to suddenly get real where I need to pause and get myself ready and then go on." Many participants, while stating the importance of lockdown drills as "sad but necessary," recognized the toll they take on them personally. Elizabeth stated, "I was aware of what I needed to do, but to actually have to do those drills always gave me a little bit of anxiety." Claire recalled her first lockdown as a teacher with preschool children. Her "anxiety was already high," and the sensor on the automatic toilet kept flushing the toilet during the drill. The use of videos as training was mentioned by multiple participants, but for some, it proved traumatic when they saw themselves in the training footage. Anne's experienced trauma as a graduate student when the local law enforcement giving the presentation used slides showing pictures of our school and classmates and told the story of the Columbine shooting. Even telling me about the experience during the interview was retraumatizing for her. She shared, "Even just now remembering it, I felt myself going into panic … I lost it, wailing, running from the room. Doing all the things that you never want to do." Jamie spoke about the ability to compartmentalize her trauma during drills at school articulating, "Trauma is weird, and there are so many other factors. When I was in front of kids, and I was the only adult, I was able to compartmentalize every single time." She added that she did have to

ask for a minute after one specific drill, but that did not happen until another adult entered the room. The common feeling of trauma during school drills was expressed by multiple participants.

Some participants also experienced trauma at school when there had been another school shooting in the media. With increasing frequency, participants receive news of another school shooting while they are teaching or at school and have to manage their own trauma as well as the anxiety of their students. Theresa shared, "I always know when there's been a school shooting. Someone will want to give me a hug. I'm like what happened, what shooting happened?" Matthew expressed anger with the lack of care for him as a survivor, sharing how employers say to use personal days and take care of your mental health but do not really understand that survivors who are teachers need their own kind of support. Continuing about school administrators, Matthew declared, "When there's another shooting, I never feel like they're taking care of me. They're taking care of the kids."

The way that participants engage with their students surrounding school shootings was not consistent. Some made space in class to talk about the school shootings that happened while others tried to carry on as usual. Since Anne chose to share with her students at the beginning of each year that she was a survivor of the Columbine shooting, she would give her students an opportunity to talk about it. Louisa recognized that her students experience violence as part of their lives and would experience another event as a "blip on their radar." Matthew disclosed how he worked with another Columbine survivor who graduated the same year as he did, but "barely knew each other in high school" and shared pleasantries at work. This changed on the day of the Robb Elementary shooting in Uvalde, Texas, on May 24, 2022. Matthew described how "she was so traumatized that day, the one person in the school who should be able to handle it in the building, social worker, couldn't handle it that day, and asked me for a hug." Megan worked with preschool children and did not address school shootings with them due to their age. When another school shooting was in the media, Megan explained how she managed her own trauma in the classroom, "We go on as normal. Internally, I'm freaking out. It's taken a long time to know what to have in place as a teacher when and if that happens and if it's near us." Participants continue experiencing trauma at school as more school shootings occur and are covered in the media.

Participants also shared how the school setting can be traumatic in less expected ways. Claire recalled going to college shortly after the shooting and the vague trauma of being in a setting that felt risky and how she was "impacted … walking around on campus thinking we're just wide open here, anything could happen." Anne recalled having a lot of dreams while she was still teaching and worked on this in therapy. She shared, "There were weeks when I would have them every week. My dreams were always in the building,

and I think that's because I wasn't in the building, and I think I was trying to understand it." During the interview with me, she reflected on the impact of the physical school setting contributing to her trauma, speculating, "It's been a long time since I've had a school shooting dream. I wonder if it coincides with leaving education." Matthew also usually experiences dreams and flashbacks after another school shooting has occurred. Some participants demonstrated the complexity of trauma and shared examples of how their trauma changes over time in the school setting. Megan experienced school-specific trauma in the role of a student but was able to compartmentalize this trauma when she was in the role of a teacher. She enrolled in community college but was unable to enter the physical classroom and completed her coursework online. Megan mused, "I found it fascinating I can always go into a classroom as a teacher but not as a student." The work she did with therapists helped her understand this as a trauma response to surviving the Columbine shooting and the trust issues that she endured from the actions of the Columbine teachers who went through the shooting with her. She pondered, "Maybe the fact that I have control over the classroom as the teacher … I have measures set up where I think I can stop something or prevent something." Anne expressed similar trauma surrounding the role of teachers in the school setting during a school shooting. One of her Columbine teachers chose not to finish the school year after the shooting in 1999. For Anne, this felt like real abandonment, and while she was unclear if it influenced her decision to become a teacher recognized that at the time, "there was a really acute feeling of I wouldn't do this." When asked how she feels about it now, Anne commented:

> The work matters, and the students matter, but if I had to be there for the students at the expense of my own well-being and my children's well-being, I can imagine a situation where I would need to go. I see it much more fully now than I did as a 16-year-old.

Quite a few participants now experience school-setting trauma as parents of children attending school. Claire experienced trauma surrounding leaving her children at school and always wanting to be in proximity commenting, "I felt like I couldn't leave them, wasn't leaving the area at all." This trauma was one of the reasons that she went into teaching explaining,

> Having them start school brought a lot more anxiety for me than I was anticipating. I noticed I didn't want to be too far away from them … I started working at their school to not be too far away.

Rachel started going to therapy after a bomb threat at her children's school caused a friend to ask if she was alright, to which Rachel replied, "I told her

that it's not worse than dropping him off for school every day." She recognized the constant underlying trauma she experiences as a parent with her children in a school setting. Megan chose for her 17-year-old daughter to attend Columbine High School due to the school setting continuing to be a place of trauma for Megan. She explained that at Columbine, "They understand my anxiety. They have more undercover uniformed cops. I have never felt more secure having her in a school than at Columbine." The school has also allowed her access to the building anytime. Although some of her anxieties are allayed with her daughter attending Columbine, Megan revealed that her Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) continues to influence how she views the school setting. She is counting down how much time her daughter has left in high school until graduation commenting, "We only have that much left of her being in high school. Not that things can't happen in a college. It's a PTSD thought that she made it through high school without being shot at." Anne lamented that she feels the most hopeless about school shootings as it pertains to her children. She explained that there have been 24 years since the Columbine shooting for preventative strategies being refined and implemented, yet, "still every time I'm in my kids' classroom where are they going to hide? What can they hide inside of? What advice can I give my children if someone comes into their classroom?" These less-researched forms of school shooting trauma negatively impact the lives of participants.

A pivotal moment in this project transpired when I realized that some participants had been in additional real lockdowns as teachers or administrators. I only asked about their experience with drills based on my own experience as a teacher and also out of a lack of belief that participants would have more than one lockdown experience in their lives. Participants helped nuance the discussion surrounding school shootings and violence with their lived experiences. Louisa explained how the risk of a school shooting like the Columbine type is unlikely in her student population, where "students ran to school for safety, they didn't run home" when violence occurred outside the school and six students were shot. Louisa experienced trauma as she was substituting for a class that was not her regular class, and neither she nor the students knew the lockdown protocols. The administration made an announcement over the intercom to dial 0 if teachers had injured students in their classrooms. Louisa shared how she tries to have grace and compassion for the administration, "but I don't need to hear that over the intercom. I'm crouching in a corner with these kids, that relationship piece was missing, they don't know who I am, my story." Anne shared one of her own real incidents she experienced as an administrator at a public charter school for pregnant and parenting teenagers during an advisory meeting and potluck lunch that involved people bringing their babies and children with them. They went into lockdown, and Anne told everyone who

could nurse their babies to do so to try and keep them quiet and safe. Anne described being, "lumped together on the floor, nursing. I had my baby with me. It felt like an alternate reality. What world do we live in where we're hunched over with our babies, all of us mothers, and pregnant people?" These are poignant examples of how the school setting continues to be a traumatic space for the participants of this study.

Autoethnography

As a teacher, I have felt anxious and traumatized during drills at school. Shortly after the shooting, fire drills would really unsettle me as I was in the Columbine building with that sound going off for three hours on the day of the shooting. Active shooter trainings and lockdown drills also leave me anxious and uneasy. Some of my employers have given me advance warnings for drills, which helped me be prepared to help the children in a calmer manner. Over the years, I have also noticed that I feel more tender toward my students the rest of the day when there has been a drill. Participating in active shooter drills also caused me distress over the years. I was sitting in a hospital waiting for some blood work one summer when I received an email from my boss with an unknown training I needed to complete. I clicked on the link and unknowingly began active shooter training that I felt overwhelmed and unprepared to complete. I have never been asked by my school to help choose the type of active shooter drills we use.

When there has been another school shooting in the media, I respond differently depending on the grade level that I am teaching and where I am with my personal processing of the trauma when I get the news. There were some classes of older students I have taught over the years who knew I was a survivor of the Columbine shooting, but I did not lead class conversations when there were more school shootings in the media in any of my classes. The Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, on February 14, 2018, was very impactful for me as a teacher because I was asked by the student movement group in my town to speak at the student rally. Journalists also contacted me for interviews, which I had not done since the time of the shooting. It reopened the trauma for me and also converged my old school experience with my teaching experience at the time. I was interviewed in my classroom for two hours by a local journalist, and it was a very powerful experience for me. The Robb Elementary School shooting on May 24, 2022, devastated me in a way that surprised me and caused rage and hopelessness. My principal knew I was a survivor of the Columbine shooting and that I felt strongly about gun reform and school safety. She called me at 6:30 am the next day to let me know that a parent had offered to hire an armed guard to be at our school that day, even though we had a policy of no weapons on campus. My principal thought that it would make

the children more unsettled to have an unknown person around and argued, "We're just as safe today as we were yesterday." While she meant that we were safe the day before and that day, I believed that we were as unsafe that day as we were the day before. I always think we are open to gun violence on our school campuses any day in the United States.

I have experienced trauma in less expected ways, dealing with school campuses. I have had Columbine shooting-related dreams over the years. They usually involved the shooters and the shooting. While completing this project, I did experience more dreams about the shooting. As a parent, I have experienced trauma as my children have been part of a school lockdown. While meeting with the chairs of my committee for this study during our retreat in September 2021, I was talking about school shootings and my project when I got a text that the school was in lockdown. I instantly felt panicked and sent my husband to go retrieve them. I needed to see them and have them in my home. I have not personally been in another real lockdown, but I can imagine that I would be very traumatized if I were. Part of our decision to move to New Zealand last year was because we did not want our children to continue being in US schools, where the reality of gun violence was much more possible. Unfortunately, no country is free from violence in schools. In 2024, I was a first responder to the scene of an assault between two of my students at the secondary school where I taught. I was not in the room when it happened, but it was traumatic for me as a first responder. While I did feel re-traumatized, I was surprised that I desired to be back in the space with my students. One realization I came to was that I do not expect schools to be free of all risk, but I do expect them to be free of gun violence risk. I do not imagine a world where no one has access to kitchen knives. Our school also had the local iwi, Māori group of people of the area, come and bless the space for anyone who wanted to participate before we went back in the room for class. It helped me feel more ready to reenter the space and provide care to my students. I now teach at an all-boys' state-integrated Catholic school, which means that it is a public school with a special character. Knowing that I would have to do a lockdown drill with 28 13-year-old boys gave me some concern. We had a straightforward briefing as a staff that lasted about 10 minutes and told us the steps to take. In New Zealand, there was a school shooting in 1923, but most schools use lockdown drills to practice for a variety of emergency situations. On the day of our lockdown, I told the boys that I had been involved in real lockdowns and would appreciate them being quiet and still when it came time for the drill. They asked for specific details, but I did not answer questions. I feel strongly that students and staff do not need to feel scared to practice a lockdown drill. When the drill began, we were all meant to get on the floor, lie on our stomachs, and be quiet. On an ideal day, this is not developmentally possible for many 13-year-old boys, and in an unknown and somewhat

anxiety-provoking situation, this was definitely not possible for my class. The boys were farting, playing gun noises on their phones, pretending to snipe an imaginary shooter, and texting each other. During the drill, I mostly disassociated and tried to just get through it. I felt dysregulated after and went to get coffee before finishing my school day. When we were asked for feedback on how the drill went, I reflected after feeling calmer. I did not feel angry with the boys. Although a few of them apologized to me after and said they would "take it seriously" if it were real, I do not think that is accurate. I think in a real lockdown, people feel different emotions than during a drill, but I believe that what is needed in a drill and an actual event is similar. I suggest that teachers do what my participants and I did during the Columbine shooting and what we continue to do as teachers: have something for the students to do, have a candy to suck on, and expect that there will be some noise. While it may seem like my students were unkind, I am grateful that for many of them, that may have been their first lockdown drill, and for them, school shootings are things that happen in the United States. While I am not naive and know that a school shooting could happen in New Zealand, since access to firearms is much less common, it is less likely.

Personally

All participants shared ways that surviving the Columbine shooting affects them personally through their relationships outside their teaching and school roles. Some expressed gratitude for the people in their lives, and almost all shared how their trauma affected parenting.

Gratitude for the People in Their Lives

A few participants expressed how the shooting helped them value and not take people in their lives for granted. Megan stated, "As a wife, I don't take things for granted." Claire agreed, sharing,

> It sounds so cliche, but I have really tried to live my life and be happy and let everybody that I know know that I love them. Very important to find happiness … Helped my relationships a lot, not settle.

Theresa commented on how the shooting "impacted my relationship with my family … And just that I, you know, I think I'm so so grateful for the life I have." Directly after the shooting, there were various memorial services, and Goldie remembered attending one with people she thought were her friends who forgot she came with them and left her at the church. She shared, "That played a big role for me, how I valued my friendships. Who really is my friend? I found more authenticity in my friendships." Goldie and I talked

about the friendship that we had in middle school and how we both saw our friendship as drifting apart by the day of the shooting. She told me that she still had a Christmas ornament from one of the friends we were both friends with in elementary school, and it was on her tree during the interview. She reflected, "Man, I should have been a better friend. Genuine friends now, not as many, count on one hand all the people you love, it's enough, it's good." I also experienced sadness that she and I had drifted apart before the shooting and had not reconnected until this project. Being grateful for the people in their lives seemed to be influenced by the trauma they experienced from surviving the shooting. Another way that participants expressed gratitude for the people in their lives was the care they received after the shooting.

Many shared how the community came together and supported them and cared for them. Jamie shared a photo of a stuffed toy, seen in Figure 8.1, that she described as "a lamb I received as a gift from the mother of a coworker of my dad. It reminds me of how we all pulled together as a nation and hope." Elizabeth made a book of cards that people sent her at the time that "reminded me of the community, love and support, the good that comes out." Theresa received a blanket from an organization called Project Linus, which provides blankets to children during times of crisis. She shared a photo of the blanket, seen in Figure 8.2, remarking, "It's really become a symbol of comfort to me. It was a symbol of comfort at the time.

Figure 8.1 Jamie's Elicitation Item. A lamb received after the shooting from a family friend. Photograph by Jamie.

Figure 8.2 Theresa's Elicitation Item. Linus Project blanket received after the shooting. Photograph by Theresa.

My neighbor a big tough senior carried his blanket around for days, weeks." Anne described going back to school the next year and all the family and community support that made a physical and metaphorical "hedge of protection" around them to block out the media. She commented, "We could be in that space, and we were safe because they were there, this hedge of protection that they formed." She remembered, "the aftermath, the care, and how the community came together. But also sadness, the 'never forget.' Of course we haven't forgotten, but it continues to happen. So how can we forget if there isn't action?"

After I finished collecting data, the adviser of this project asked if gratitude for being alive had come out as a theme. While gratitude for people in their lives was expressed, only Theresa mentioned gratitude for being alive in our first interview. I reacted strongly to the question and wondered how the other participants would feel. I posed it as a question in the follow-up interviews. The responses were varied.

Some participants shared that they are grateful for being alive and wish they were more aware of it on a daily basis or notice it at certain moments. Jamie agonized, "It makes me feel a little bad because I don't walk around

every day and say thank God I'm alive. I'm so grateful. I am thankful for the blessings God has bestowed upon me." Goldie agreed, stating, "It's been too many years. Now I don't really think too much about that. I wish I did. I wish I sometimes had a little more gratitude for being alive." Anne reflected, "I do have gratitude for being alive … that I get to have this life, I get to be a mom. I get to be an adult. I do feel intense gratitude at certain moments."

Others responded that they do try to feel gratitude for being alive every day. Theresa shared, "I am so grateful to be alive. Maybe it's not said, maybe it's just a given. Everything I'm able to do in life I'm able to do because I survived." While Abby also expressed gratitude for being alive, unlike Theresa, she does not always attribute it to surviving the Columbine shooting. She explained, "I definitely have gratitude for being alive … I feel like there comes a time in everybody's life where we suffer, or will suffer, trying to have that gratitude every day. I just don't contribute it to Columbine." Rachel reflected on how trauma can "freeze" where one tells the same story and has the same feelings. She was grateful for this question and the chance to have new ideas and new feelings about the event. Rachel stated, "You do try to be grateful every day for being alive."

Some participants stated that while they are grateful for being alive, this question and their feelings about being alive are complicated. Matthew observed, "The whole grateful to be alive, it's hard. I survived but at what cost? Fifteen of my classmates died. Survivors' guilt, why was I chosen to live?" Similarly, Goldie remarked, "I think when it first happened, I felt that sense of gratitude. But I also felt kind of guilty, too, I don't know. Survivor's guilt I guess." Megan commented, "Of course, I'm grateful, but that's not something I would go around because we lost 13. That's part of the survivors' guilt."

Quite a few participants reacted to the question itself. Anne commented, "It is interesting for a non-survivor to ask if that's a theme. There definitely feels like there's the expectation that we're grateful that we didn't get killed." Louisa retorted, "Why would you think there is a main theme? Why would you even point one out, especially one that is leading? I'm going into lawyer speak, I'm not a lawyer. Why would that even be a question?" While Louisa is not a lawyer, she showed her English teacher persona when she dissected the wording of the question. She stated, "Grateful, the word means given something … The gift would be given by the shooters. That is not what happened at all, they didn't give gifts to some, but they murdered some." Megan said, "I mean I think that's like an adolescent viewpoint, something like you assume they'd feel." Claire thought the question was "flippant" and "a little condescending." She commented, "That seems that that person doesn't fully understand or care about what I went through. I think I'm feeling in a flippant mood." Claire continued to share that when she was in college, people said that since she got out alive, it did not really happen to her.

These experiences made her question and doubt herself, and this question seemed to trigger those same feelings for her. Matthew felt less insulted by the question and saw it as a way to enlighten non-survivors stating, "Non-survivors mean well, they're not trying to hurt me. Let's use this as a way to educate them on how we feel. How it affects us. Inform you on how talking to a survivor works." And Megan shared that she does not want non-survivors to share in this experience commenting, "I don't want them (non-survivors) to understand it. I don't want them to know different ways of prepping your classroom to stop an intruder."

And while the participants all expressed gratitude for being alive, two addressed what expectations we have of safety at school. Matthew lamented, "I survived and now I get to live in this world where school shootings are still happening far too frequently." Anne said sorrowfully:

> We're all glad we didn't die on that day, but shouldn't that be the expectation of going to school? Maybe the gratitude is balanced with what the actual expectation should be and the horror and sadness that these friends of ours did not get to fulfill that expectation.

Autoethnography

I could not bring myself to write a note home to my parents while I hid inside the school on the day of the shooting, like some of the children in the room with me. It was partly because I could not let my mind go to the thought of my death but also because I knew that my parents knew I loved them. Instead, I played a game of Hangman where you have to guess the phrase in a certain number of letters. While conducting this research, I discovered that Matthew saved everything from that day, including my hangman game from sharing a space together on the day of the shooting, as seen in Figures 8.3 and 8.4. I felt really strange seeing my handwriting and my birth name and knowing that those papers were with me during the shooting. When Matthew and I talked about the hangman game, he commented,

> You all needed paper. I think the hangman stuff is still in there … It's still surreal to me that I've had all of these papers that you and someone else must have been using to occupy your minds while we went through all of that.

The need to let people know that I care about them increased after the shooting, and I find that at various times in my life, I reach out to friends and family to let them know I love them. While this is influenced by surviving the school shooting, there have been other traumatic experiences in my life that also impact my desire to value the people in my life.

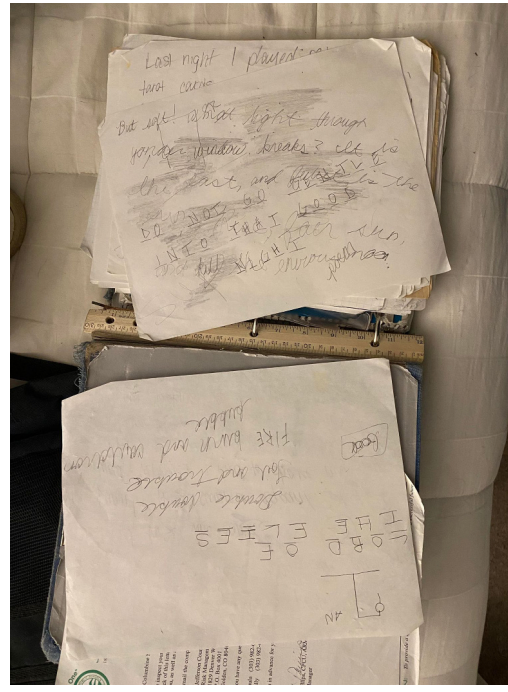

Figure 8.3 Michelle's Elicitation Items. The picture is the Hangman game I played while hiding during the shooting. Photograph by Matthew.

When my chair asked about the theme of gratitude for being alive, I felt slightly angry. Similarly to Anne, I feel outraged that I should be expected to feel grateful for not being murdered at school by my classmates. That should be the basic expectation we have for our schools: that children will not be murdered there. But I am also grateful for my life and having "the extra life" that my AP English teacher spoke about. I know my chair and have seen her care and concern for me, but the other participants only know that a non-survivor asked the question. I found the comments by Matthew and Megan important as they talked about educating non-survivors while also not wanting non-survivors to ever understand our experience. I hope that this book helps with that in some small way.

How Their Trauma Affected Parenting: "I just hate that my kids live in this world." Anne

While four of the participants are not parents, 10 of the 11 participants spoke about how trauma affected their parenting surrounding themes of choosing to have children or not, telling their children they're a survivor or

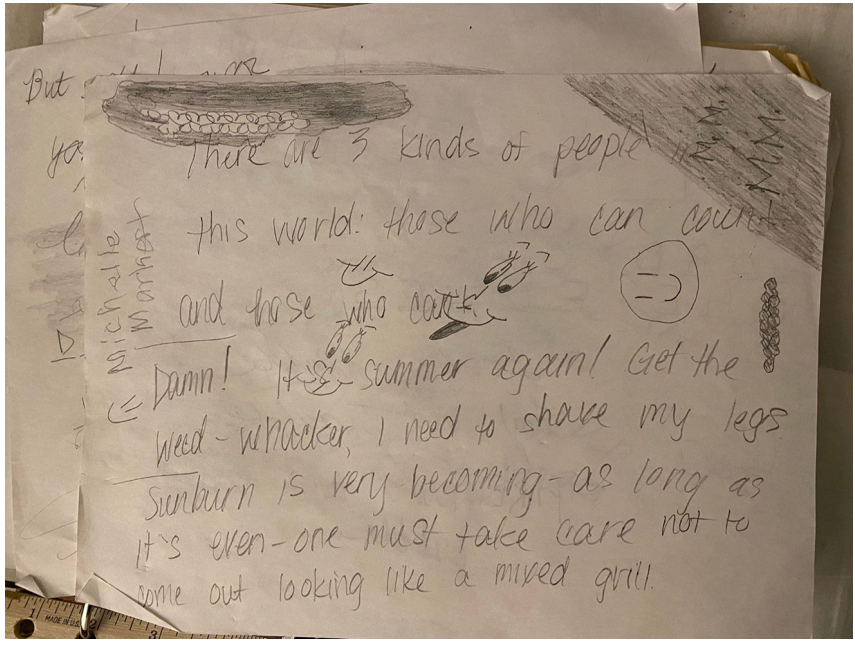

Figure 8.4 Michelle's Elicitation Items. The picture has my name and initials: Michelle Markert, M.M. Photograph by Matthew.

not and how they talk to their children about school shootings, worrying that their children will experience or act out a school shooting, and how they understand the shooters' parents.

Jamie, Louisa, Matthew, and Theresa do not have children. Louisa and Matthew discussed not having children during our interviews. Louisa regularly does media interviews in her work with the nonprofit organization about her experience as a survivor. In one interview after a school shooting, the interviewer asked if she did not have children because of surviving the shooting at Columbine. She responded, "That's a bizarre question. I'm actually not able to have children. I'm pretty aware of how Columbine impacted my life, and if it impacted that choice, I'm not aware of it." In contrast, Matthew shared that a big reason he does not have children of his own is because of the Columbine shooting. He shared, "I feel considerably less safe at schools than I ever have in my life, and the last thing I want to do is bring my own child into this world with so much uncertainty. Doesn't seem fair." Matthew considered having children until about 10 or 15 years ago, but now sees public schools as unsafe. He explained that there are many ways children can hurt themselves at school, and it is "not the fault of students or teachers, but things can happen. Don't want them feeling unsafe in a

building where they should absolutely feel safe." I shared this perspective with Louisa in our follow-up interview because she had surmised that the journalist had asked her the original question because they had heard someone say that before. Matthew's statement did prove that it might be a reasonable question to ask a school survivor, but in Louisa's words, "That to me falls in the same vein of why you don't ask people why they don't have kids, very insensitive in that way … No, I can't (have kids), thanks for bringing it up A-hole."

Participants who were parents varied in their decision to tell their children that they survived the Columbine shooting. Those who told their children differed on the extent to which they disclosed. Megan shared about her daughter, "She knows that I was in the shooting, not the path out. I want her to enjoy high school. High school is enjoyable for most people." Claire told her children but questioned if she had done it "right" and had anxiety about her son's reaction. She remembered, "When I first told my son he had more questions about Eric and Dylan, and I was like yeah I'm not talking about this." Claire added, "I don't think they can fully comprehend until they're fully adults. I didn't until I was an adult. I'm still working on it in each stage. I'm thinking of taking them to the memorial. I've shied away from it." Rachel thought she had told her children she was a survivor until our interview. When we met for the second interview, she told me that since our first interview, they played a family game of sharing something about themselves that no one in the family knows about. Rachel said, "I won with I went to Columbine … I thought it was something we'd been talking about, but it isn't, not recently." She added, "They knew that I don't like guns, and some of my friends killed some of my other friends." How participants talk to their children about school shootings also varied greatly. Claire brings up the topic when a school shooting has occurred, asks if they have questions, and goes over what they do and what to look out for. She tells them, "School is safe. The teachers are going to do their best to take care of you." Rachel, on the other hand, would advise her children, "You should not be in the place where you will be in danger." A friend of hers with children told her she should not tell her children that. But Rachel repeated, "Tell your kid that you have no control of where you are if something happens." Being married to a man whose grandfather lost family members in the Holocaust camps, along with her own survival experience, influences how she views risk and control. Rachel recommended, "Help your kids know that it's ok to do what you need to survive … Lot of emphasis on terrible things happen. You don't have control. You will do what you do, and then you go on." Other participants have chosen not to tell their children that they are survivors due to the age of their children. Elizabeth commented that her children know that things happen, but not specifically at schools adding, "Honestly, my kids have been too young to talk about it much." Anne felt similarly stating,

"I haven't told my children, my daughter is nine. I thought maybe I'd tell her when she's 10. I don't want it to be too real but also not a family secret." She added that she does not want her children to have to be in a lockdown and "bear that that happened at my mom's school." Anne shared an image of the Project Linus blanket she received after the shooting, seen in Figure 8.5, that reminds her of the hedge of protection the community provided after the shooting and the hedge of protection she's tried to be for other people ever since. Anne gave the blanket to her daughter, explaining it to me as "a sad little family heirloom, that someday I'll talk to my daughter about." She added that eventually "I'll tell them about the hard stuff and the sad stuff, and Cassie (Bernall, a friend killed in the shooting), and the hedge of protection. I hope they don't hear it as scary, but they hear that there's hope."

Participants worry about the safety of their children and increasingly fear their children will experience a school shooting. Anne shared, "The most terrifying thing to me is that something like this could happen to my kids." Claire explained she was not prepared for the anxiety she felt when her children started school; "that kind of anxiety where I didn't want to leave them because I wanted to get to them" if something happened. It would be expected that all parents worry about their children being victims of a school

Figure 8.5 Anne's Elicitation Item. Linus Project blanket received after the shooting. Photograph by Anne.

shooting. But a more nuanced theme that came out of the data was that of participants fearing that their children would be the perpetrators of a school shooting. Claire mentioned worrying about how to raise her children, and specifically shared that raising a son caused "a big mental controversy for me" and did not allow her son to have any toy guns. She said, "I've always been like guns are bad. Some people are responsible." She eventually let her son play Nerf guns with the family during the time at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. She said it was so fun, but also still a controversy for her. Abby has two young sons and said, "How can I protect my kids from being that violent kid, I think, is the ultimate fear" adding "I do worry having boys, a little more than having girls." This understanding of the complexities of parenting is important to address, as we both fear that our children might be victims and perpetrators of violence.

This theme carried over into discussing participants' understanding of the Columbine shooters' parents through the lens of being parents themselves. Abby voiced, "If we're all honest with ourselves Sue Klebold seems like a nice person. I read her book. I absolutely have compassion for her … I think she tried the best she could. I see her as a victim." Megan concurred stating, "Sue Klebold, she's a lovely human being … I believe her son died way before the 20th. I don't have any blame for her." Abby commented, "It's interesting with Eric and Dylan if we'd had mental health. I'm sure their parents were doing things, juvenile detention, that's what society did versus therapy." While Megan had compassion for Sue Klebold, she said she does blame the other perpetrator's mother, believing that she was aware of her son's mental health problems. Megan speculated:

> In college, I got to see some of the diagnoses that he had … There were telltale signs that this wasn't just a whim, that this was going to happen. And I think if there wasn't denial on his parents, fault on his parents' side that could have helped prevent mass trauma.

Claire felt conflicted after reading Sue Klebold's book, hoping to gain some understanding of the shooting. She asserted, "We needed somebody to blame. How could their parents have missed everything? Their parents were always who I've blamed. As a parent, I can kind of see, but not really. I know what's going on under our roof." Claire suggested that even if a teacher sees a student exhibiting warning signs and once a teacher tells the parents, "Then it's in the parents' hands." But Abby addressed that the situation is more complex than expecting parents to be able to do anything about the warning signs. She acknowledged feeling unprepared to handle the mental challenges that she encounters as a teacher with her students and how this relates to parenting. She believed that parents may know their child is struggling, but lack the resources to get adequate mental health services. Abby

suggested that group homes might be a solution for children with severe mental health issues if done in a loving and professional way. She surmised, "It can get to the point where parents can know their kid is struggling. I think Eric's dad would have been willing to put him in a home." Participants reflected deeply on the role of the shooters' parents and their own role as parents as it pertains to school shootings.

Autoethnography

My husband and I planned to adopt children from the beginning of our marriage. We waited until we had been married for seven years to go through the process of getting licensed to foster and adopt. Our son was placed with us in November 2010, when he was three months old, and we had three hours' notice before he was delivered to our house. Our daughter came to our house eight months later. To have two children aged 19 days apart, both under the age of one, was overwhelming in both difficult and joyous ways.

I do not remember exactly how old my children were when I shared with them that I am a Columbine survivor, but I chose to tell them in relation to conversations about Nerf guns. Just as Claire experienced angst about letting her children play with toy guns, I wrestled with the decision. I decided I did not want the toys to become an off-limits obsession for my children but also wanted them to know why I felt so strongly against real guns. Over the years, I have shared my experience with gun violence with them to instill in them valuing human life and not using guns as a way to provide a false sense of security. When I spoke at the student rally after the Parkland shooting, my children attended and learned more about my position on guns. My son told me about times he read about me in a random school assignment, and he frequently asks if there has been a mass shooting that week. He celebrated one day when I said there had not been a mass shooting, only to be devastated when I explained to him that there are shootings in the United States every day, just not always a mass shooting. I do not try to instill extreme fear in my children about school shootings, but I also do not tell them that school is safe.

Part of our decision to move to New Zealand was for them to go to school in a country with less chance of school shootings. While I rationally know that there is little statistical probability that they will experience a school shooting, it is eminently possible with the number of guns that are in the United States, and specifically in Texas, where we lived. Like Abby, I am also aware that my children could also be perpetrators of violence, and I want them to experience life in a culture that does not have the same gun culture as the United States.

The shooting has also led me to recognize the need for awareness around suicide prevention. One of my biggest fears as a parent is that one of my

children could die by suicide. I used to think my role as a parent was to help my children eliminate big emotions that felt overwhelming. As I watched my young children have very large feelings, I recognized that part of being human is feeling really intense positive and negative emotions. I desire to help my children name their feelings and be able to tolerate any feelings that they may have, and learn how to regulate their bodies and brains in a way that is healthy. When my son was quite young, he would have such intense feelings that he would say he wished he were dead. I panic when I hear that phrase, and I take it very seriously. We worked through what he was feeling and what he wished could happen with those feelings. We discussed how he wished the situation were different, but he did not want to die. I also had him call our therapist's crisis hotline so that he understood the seriousness of those words and that there are people who can help him and care about him. I want my children to know that those words are powerful and must be taken seriously. I want them to tell me or another adult if they feel distressed or hear someone else talking about suicide. This intense fear of suicide and wanting to prevent it is in part due to surviving the shooting.

I had a transformative experience surrounding my feelings about the parents of Eric and Dylan. Immediately following the shooting, I helped get our final edition of the high school paper published with computers loaned from a local company. With a newspaper hub set up in my parents' dining room, newspaper staff members spent time writing stories about the shooting and our stories from our perspectives. I wrote many of the victim biographies and remembrance pages, which were both healing and difficult for me. I was adamant that if I had to list Eric and Dylan as victims, I would not publish the paper. While my anger was justified, my need to ostracize Eric and Dylan, and their families was not helpful. When I became a mother in 2010, my perspective shifted after hearing Sue Klebold give a TED Talk about her grief and experience. I felt sad that she had grieved alone and that I had thought my anger toward her would somehow make me feel better. As I imagined what she experienced as a mother, I no longer needed a clear distinction between victim and offender. This experience helped me on my journey to learn more about RPs. In January 2022, I spoke with Sue on a Zoom call to share my research and my experience. I thought I was ready for the meeting, but felt overwhelmed with emotion before clicking on Start Meeting. Sue first apologized on her son's behalf for anything that I have experienced. She told me their family had never had guns in their house and were against guns. I had grown up in a military family that had multiple guns in our house and was taken to the shooting range for target practice when I was in elementary school. I had never been comfortable with guns and did not like them, but I knew my dad valued gun safety. Around this same time in my childhood, my mom thought I was an intruder during one of my childhood sleepwalking incidents. She had her gun out, and we encountered each other

in our connecting bathrooms. That night and the night of the Columbine shooting were the only nights I was ever allowed to sleep in my parents' room. Horrible accidents can happen when guns are around. And horrible tragedies can be acted out when guns are available. I wanted to separate myself from Sue, but I no longer could. Sue and I are much more similar in our parenting in terms of guns than my parents and I are. As a mother, I recognized that part of loving my children is realizing that I may not be able to stop every horrible thing from happening to them or that they do. But what I also believe about the shooting is that we have a communal responsibility for the children in our lives. We are responsible for the people around us and building relationships of trust as best we can. Sue now works for suicide prevention and awareness, as she understood Dylan's death as a suicide. I affirm this work as she does what I am doing, trying to make a change in the area that affects us most and gives us hope and some peace in our lives. For some reason, the other three parents received little attention from me over the years. I hope that they are well and have been able to grieve their own loss. Losing a child is horrible, no matter what the circumstances.

Physically

Most participants shared how the trauma of surviving the Columbine shooting affected them physically. Some of the categories that came out were being different in public settings, numbing their feelings, and engaging in dangerous coping mechanisms.

Public Settings

Some participants experience trauma responses when they are out in public. Jamie revealed, "I won't ever sit with my back to a door. I get to meetings a half hour before to ensure the seat that I want." Anne explained, "I'm different out in public. There's an awareness and level of perception that accompanies the anxiety and the fear." Megan shared that she is always aware of her surroundings and always has an exit plan. Claire agreed stating how the shooting has impacted her safety, making her more aware of her situation and exit strategies while sitting in places, imagining if something happened, what she could do.

Autoethnography

I was surprised by some of the participants' experiences of feeling unsafe in public because this has not been my experience. But as I reflected, this is true for me whenever there is a loud noise, such as a car backfiring. Earlier on, it would cause a startle reflex or something that might be considered a panic

attack. I have a vivid memory of taking my children to an amusement park for the first time when they were in elementary school. We walked through the Old West section, and the actors started shooting blanks. My brain shut down, I started breathing quickly, and I just had to get out of there. My son was saying, "Mommy, they're not real." I knew that, but I needed to get out of there. Since moving to New Zealand, I have heard fireworks and not instantly wondered if they were gunshots for the first time since the shooting happened. Even though gun ownership is legal for specific reasons in New Zealand. I can feel a physical difference in the ease my body feels when I know that there are just not many, or any, guns in public settings.

Numbing Feelings

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the numbness or lack of feelings that some participants experienced. Jamie experienced insomnia triggered by the murder in 2021 of the SRO who worked at her school. Jamie shared, "I had to go get drugs. I couldn't sleep. I haven't had to have medication to sleep since the shooting." Anne explained that the constant media coverage of school shootings can feel like a "nonstop onslaught" that affects her a lot. She articulated, "There are some periods of my life I cruise on past. I can know nothing about this. Numb, be numb. I want to be numb. Numbness is the goal. Don't feel this." For others, the numbness felt less like a choice and more like a response to trauma. Matthew recalled the day of the shooting stating, "I thought I hope this doesn't affect the bus schedule. It still kind of haunts me that I didn't feel anything. I felt scared but not that scared." People asked him right after the shooting how he felt, and his response was "Fine." He confided, "That's so hard to tell someone. I'm just learning that that's a symptom" of trauma. Since Matthew and I shared the same space during the shooting, we worked through some of our memories and trauma from that day during the interview. He remembered me crying my eyes out, which I do not remember. I shared that I also had random thoughts, such as wondering if the track meet would get canceled that day. Matthew reflected:

> I didn't want to get accosted for how I felt. I felt nothing, but that is normal. Those were the thoughts going through our minds, even when later we found out our classmates were killed. Those feelings are normal, now I can let that go.

Louisa shared how the trauma of surviving the shooting caused numbness that did not allow her to feel emotions. In a therapy session, her therapist pointed out that Louisa was crying and asked what that felt like in her eyes and throat. Louisa responded, "I didn't even know what that felt like. I had shut down my body so completely, I didn't know what it felt like to cry. I had

cried but didn't feel like it." While numbness is a response to trauma and a coping mechanism, it is not constant. Anne explained, "The grief is cyclical. But it's not grief without total rage."

Autoethnography

Like some of the participants, I have had periods where I have felt numb to my feelings. I tend to be more of a thinking person, so I have a difficult time connecting to feelings in my body and emotions in general. For the few weeks immediately after the shooting, I felt sadness and exhaustion most of the time. I graduated in May of that year and went to Army Basic Training two weeks later for 10 weeks. Looking back, that whole period was a numbed sensation for me. I was hungry, exhausted, overwhelmed, and hated being there. I did not like the mission of the military and kept telling myself that I was going to be in the National Guard band, which would be different. I continued to serve in the National Guard, which entailed going for training one weekend a month in Oklahoma City with the band. My best friend from high school, Clara, who also survived the shooting, was with me for Basic Training and then also served in the same band. She recently retired from the Army after serving in the band for more than 20 years, which for her was a positive experience. I continued to struggle with the mission of the military, which was highly influenced by my experience of the Columbine shooting. With the combination of my poor health in the early 2000s due to anorexia nervosa and my belief in peace and nonviolence, I got out of the military early due to medical reasons. The military was a place where I numbed my feelings, and I recognized that it was an unhealthy environment for me. I have been mostly cerebral in my processing of the shooting over the years but have had periods where I can connect to the emotions.

Dangerous Coping Mechanisms

Participants also engaged in dangerous coping mechanisms with serious potential consequences for their health and life in response to the trauma of surviving the Columbine shooting. Rachel attributed a connection between the shooting and her "passionate binge-drinking in college." She described herself as "super high functioning" and explained the binge-drinking episodes as "every now and then I would drink and then drink until it was over." I asked each participant if they had people and practices in place in case the interviews were traumatizing. Rachel appreciated the question and said that she had yoga scheduled later that day. She admitted that eating three bags of chips or just not sleeping in response to talking with me about the initial trauma were real possibilities. Louisa warned that letting trauma go unaddressed can lead to dangerous places and felt "lucky in that the ways that

I dealt with it weren't too dangerous: developed an eating disorder, yes dangerous but was able to get out of it. Did some drugs, but nothing too dangerous." Megan disclosed that she also experienced another major trauma that compounded the trauma of surviving the shooting. She graduated from high school in 1999 and went to community college for a few years while ignoring the warning signs of trauma. Megan continued saying everything was fine, while experiencing white flashes she did not understand, and ignoring panic attacks. After a manic period, she attempted suicide. She got the help that she needed and continues to utilize different types of therapy to process each trauma, including Bessel van der Kolk's (2014) book *The Body Keeps the Score*, which addresses the physical effects of trauma on the body. The item she brought represents how the trauma has been so physically traumatic for her, to the point of almost losing her life to it. Megan keeps an ornament next to her bed, seen in Figure 8.6, which was made by a survivor of a mass shooting. She described it as being made of "the hardest geometric shapes to break, a phoenix rising from the ashes, representing the five types of therapies we can work on to go on with life." Megan's body experienced terrible physical trauma from the shooting. But she said, one day, "When I get the

Figure 8.6 Megan's Elicitation Item. A design created by a survivor of a mass shooting. Photograph by Megan.

courage to get a tattoo I will get that" and will alter her body in a way that offers her a way to go on. While participants may have jokingly shared some of their physical coping mechanisms and considered themselves "lucky" for not having anything too serious, all of these examples demonstrate how insidious the trauma of surviving the Columbine shooting was on participants and the constant work it takes for some of us to remain well.

Autoethnography

Before the shooting, I had an undiagnosed eating disorder, anorexia nervosa. This was only worsened by the trauma of the shooting and then going to Basic Training immediately after. I did not understand my behaviors or the mental anguish I was in. During my last year of college, I heard an announcement from our college nurse about eating disorders and an informational group she was leading. The idea resonated with me, and for the first time, I wondered if I was not being vain but maybe had a mental illness. My husband and I got married the week after our college graduation in May of 2003, and moved to New Jersey, where he went to graduate school, and I got my first teaching job. Since I had no healthy coping mechanisms at this point in my life, my health deteriorated quickly due to all of the changes. Matt has always been an amazing support to me, but we did not know how to recover from an eating disorder. I only saw a therapist a few times in fifth grade when my dad was activated for Desert Storm, and I was anxious and depressed, before I began seeing a therapist at the Renfrew Center in 2003. The work was good and hard, but my symptoms became so much worse. About a month before our first wedding anniversary, my health was so poor that I needed to be at the inpatient Renfrew Center for 45 days. We were lucky that our insurance covered most of it, but it was still expensive. It was convenient that it was only an hour from our home, so Matt could visit and participate in therapy and groups with me. It was the start of my recovery and sobriety from an eating disorder, but it has been a long journey. At that time, I was diagnosed with osteopenia, bone loss, which progressed to osteoporosis. At times in my life, I was prescribed medication for bone loss, which can have serious side effects. I spent another summer in 2009 at an outpatient Renfrew Center in Dallas. Matt would drive me there each day, spend the day in a library or park, and then drive us the hour commute home. I was too weak and tired to make the drive by myself. During all of these years, I went to therapists for my anorexia. In 2015, I had another period of weight loss that was dangerous, and our friends led an intervention with me and said I needed to do something. I spent the next few years working with my doctor and therapist again to regain weight and try to remain stable. In 2018, I discovered a book that really transformed my understanding of eating disorders as biologically based mental illnesses, which set me on a path of

recovery that has been more successful for me. My osteoporosis has reversed, my menstrual cycles have returned, and I am much healthier and more stable than I have been in years. But to maintain an eating disorder sobriety is daily work for me, just like sobriety for an alcoholic. My husband spent the first ten years of our marriage assuming he would be a widower by the age of 35 because my health was so poor. And I know that living with a mother with a mental illness affects my children. I feel so sad for the pain my eating disorder has caused them. But guilt and shame are part of the disorder and not helpful for recovery. The eating disorder was the only coping mechanism I had before the shooting, and I clung to it after the shooting. I wish we had known more about eating disorders, and there was less blame around what caused them when I was a teenager. I wish I had sought therapy right after the shooting. I realized while collecting data for this project that I have never gone to a therapist because of the shooting. It's just something I mentioned in passing before talking about anorexia. This is an example of how I have minimized the traumatic experience of the shooting and the dangerous physical toll it took on my body.

Philosophically

Participants also experienced philosophical responses to the trauma of surviving a school shooting around categories of orienting the year around the date of the shooting, minimizing their trauma, wondering who they would have been, anger and blame, fear of the future and the unknown, understanding it as a one-time event, making them more empathetic, how it affected their memories of high school, and addressing if "We're no different than non-survivors."

Orienting the Year Around the Date of the Shooting

While it was not a major theme that came out from all the participants, there are indications that participants' orientation of time might be influenced by the date of the shooting. Anne shared that she participated in an active shooter training one year ago on April 19, and the trauma response she had from the training. She voiced, "I'm fragile in April. April is not my month." When Rachel was explaining the elicitation item she brought to share, seen in Figure 8.7, she jokingly said, "My best friend from Michigan sends me gorgeous flowers two days after, obviously the only day that matters in the whole entire calendar year." She explained, "The way that Columbine is still present and transformed in my life is clear in those flowers, ephemeral and also a way to remember … There's a tiny red Columbine in it." Louisa shared, "Sometimes in April I get a little bit more anxious. I'll also have like anxiety dreams." Megan will not work on April 20th. She added, "Usually,

Figure 8.7 Rachel's Elicitation Items. Flowers from a friend for April 20, a red Columbine flower. Photograph by Rachel.

March and April get a little touchy." Even though the date might affect participants, Megan also acknowledged, "Not every year is like that. Some years the anniversary creeps up, and it's like, oh it's next week. I've learned not to expect anything and just go with the flow." Even sharing that sometimes it creeps up on her demonstrates the power of that date to still be present in her life. Around the time of the 20th anniversary, Claire wanted to do something to commemorate the date. She found an artist who made an acrylic painting of a Columbine, seen in Figure 8.8, and mailed it to Claire's house and returned her money, thanking Claire for sharing her story. Claire remarked that the painting is "hanging in our living room, not blaring to anyone who comes over but something to me." Matthew saved his backpack and all the items in it from the day of the shooting including the clothes he was wearing that day, shown in Figure 8.9 and Figure 8.10. Other participants also mentioned saving clothing or items from the day. Matthew said he saved, "My backpack from that day …. The shirt and shoes I was wearing are in there … Relic of that day … The shirt didn't get washed, it's been sitting in that backpack for years …"

Figure 8.8 Claire's Elicitation Item. Columbine acrylic painting for the 20th anniversary. Photograph by Claire.

Autoethnography

Each year, I notice when it is April 20. Some years it feels more challenging than others. I reach out to friends from high school and make sure I let them know I am thinking of them. Friends I have made over the years are aware that I am a survivor and tend to reach out to me. I tend to feel more fragile around that date, not always handling big emotions very well. I also feel more connected to and tender toward people in my life. I do not think I orient my whole year around that date, but it is a reference date that I am always aware of. Matt proposed to me on April 21, 2002, to have something that might help that time of the year to not only be about grief, while acknowledging that it will always be a heavy time of year. Since the shooting, I have never liked seeing the time 4:20 on the clock, and I feel my body react negatively when I see it. I was surprised that I also feel upset when the food I buy has an expiration date of 4/20. I purposefully avoided buying food with that expiration date in the past but have been able to handle it in more recent years. I was actually relieved when I recognized that due to the date being written day then the month in New Zealand, I have some salads

Figure 8.9 Matthew's Elicitation Items. His backpack from the day of the shooting. Photograph by Matthew.

in my refrigerator right now that expire on 20/4, but I did not have a negative reaction due to the number reversal. While this sounds pointless and unimportant to include in a doctoral project, it shows how insidious trauma is and how profoundly it affects me.

Minimizing Their Trauma

When many participants shared their personal stories of their experience during the shooting on April 20, 1999, they used minimizing language such as "lucky," "least traumatizing," and "somebody has it worse." Abby reflected, "I feel like in some ways I was lucky. I was in math class, far from where it started." Rachel remarked, "I always thought I had the least traumatizing experience that day, the one you'd sign up for." Due to Goldie's location during the shooting, she commented, "It's funny because I really felt like I wasn't there, but I was. Survivors' guilt, they didn't really talk about it at the time." Claire also mentioned survivor's guilt when she explained the conflicting narrative she has of her own experience. She did not consider her story worthy

Figure 8.10 Matthew's Elicitation Items. His clothes and shoes from the day of the shooting. Photography by Matthew.

of trauma and only learned about survivors' guilt about six years ago through the work of the Rebel Mass Project. Claire used to believe, "With my story, I wasn't a part of it. I don't need to be upset even though I was upset." Louisa explained as a "physically uninjured survivor I never felt like I had the right to feel what I was feeling, always thought other people had it worse than me." Although participants acknowledged the need not to make a hierarchy of trauma or judge their own experience and response, this proved difficult to do. When explaining how trauma manifests for her, Claire described:

> I get triggered every once in a while but nothing major I don't think. It can be anything from just being in a mall with a fire drill. That happened a couple of Christmases ago. A YMCA with a fire drill when my kids are around, too, Just even the sweaty palms, shaking when anyone even asks where I went to high school. Sometimes maybe a loud noise in a store or somewhere you're not expecting a loud noise to be.

This long list of responses to trauma still did not seem major to Claire, even though it interferes with her daily life. Others also shared similar ways of

talking about their trauma response. When I asked participants if they had any trauma response between our first and second interviews, Matthew and Megan both said, "Nothing out of the ordinary." When asked to expand on what ordinary means for him, Matthew said, "Dreams and flashbacks usually come back after another shooting has occurred, or talking to someone, not difficult, nothing too unusual from what usually happens." He said he has a dream about once a month now, and they are getting further and further away. Megan explained that she has done interviews in the past and feels equipped to handle her response. She shared, "I'm usually tired afterward, so I don't plan anything … I don't put any expectations on me. I do things that calm me. I do cross-stitch." These stories demonstrate that participants recognize the negative effects of minimizing their trauma, but it is still something they engage in when talking about their experiences.

While participants sometimes minimized their own stories, some also endured other people minimizing their lived experiences. Louisa said, "I still feel a need to justify where I was in response to the judgment I get from people. 'Oh, you weren't in the library? Oh, you weren't where people were murdered?'" In her work with trauma survivors, she has given a Congressional testimony in which she shared details of her own survival. Louisa said, "People often don't think my experience was bad enough to experience the things I experienced." Claire shared how she went to a military therapist when her husband was stationed near Washington D.C., but stopped going when the therapist began comparing Claire's experience with soldiers who spent time in Afghanistan and Iraq. Claire acknowledged that "in the big scheme of things is not a war zone, but that day kind of felt like one." When talking about the theme of minimizing in our second interview, Jamie made clear that she did not intend to minimize her situation or give that impression. She stated, "This thing shaped my life and my worldview. And while yes, I understand I could have been injured, I could have seen someone die, it could have been worse. It was pretty bad." Understanding that someone might have had it worse, however that is defined, does not mean that a participant has to also say that their experience was not traumatic.

Autoethnography

I know that what I experienced during the shooting was difficult and horrible, but I always knew that other people suffered more that day. I am an uninjured survivor who did not see any major violence that day and was only trapped in the building for three hours, which is how I have minimized the telling of my story over the years. I have a major startle reflex with loud noises or if someone walks in the room with me, and I was not aware they were there, but I justified that it is not that bad. While my closest friends were not injured or killed, I know people who were injured or died, and

believe that what they suffered is harder trauma than mine. Right after the shooting, I was supposed to go to Army Basic Training. I joined the Army to be in the National Guard band in March 1999 and would serve one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer for four years after high school. My high school best friend, Clara, also enlisted. My dad took us to the shooting range after the shooting to see how we would react. It was horrible. I was crying, having trouble breathing, and felt like I was having a panic attack. My dad could not understand the reaction since he said it was not anything like that day. Clara and I were taken to meet with a military psychologist to ascertain if we were fit to go to Basic Training. My understanding of that meeting was to make sure that we would not "go crazy" or do anything dangerous, more than if it was to check on my well-being and mental state. We were given three options: 1. Get out of our contract. 2. Go to Basic Training as planned. 3. Delay one summer to go to Basic Training. I remember thinking that if I did not go that summer, I would not go at all. That should have been an indicator to me and the adults in my life that it might not be the healthiest of options for my future. I have shared about the Columbine shooting with each therapist I have worked with, but I always talk about it as an aside, more than something that needs to be addressed. Since the activism work that I started doing after the Parkland shooting in 2018 and my research for this project, I began worrying that I was always talking about my experience. I mentioned this to my therapist last year, and she said that until that year, I had only really talked about the shooting in passing and tended to minimize my experience. After I finish this project, I would like to go to a new therapist in New Zealand to specifically work through the trauma that I endured and continue to endure due to the horrible experience of surviving the Columbine shooting. As I read parts of Dave Cullen's book, *Columbine*, during the research for my book, I realized the intention of Eric and Dylan that day was to kill as many people as they could, which would have included me. This helped me see myself as a survivor more than I have in the past, when I thought I would have been fine since I did not see Eric or Dylan that day. If their plan had worked, though, the bombs in the cafeteria would have killed me. I am a survivor.

Wondering Who They Would Have Been

A common philosophical question asks if we are essentially the same person from birth until death, regardless of our lived experience. Some participants have wrestled with this question as it pertains to surviving the Columbine shooting. Elizabeth stated, "I remember feeling like I grew up really quickly, facing things kids shouldn't have to face." Jamie shared how the 16th anniversary of the shooting was really hard for her because it meant that she had "lived with trauma in my life more than I've lived without trauma."

She added, "Some people say, 'I won't use the word victim. I'm going to use survivor because I'm not going to let this define me.' This has defined me. I don't know who I would have been free of trauma." Anne pondered:

> It's hard to imagine who you would have been or what you would have been like if this terrible terrible thing hadn't happened at a pivotal moment. I experience the world in a very empathetic way, see other perspectives points of view. Would I have been like that regardless? I don't know.

Similarly, Rachel spoke about how with some plants you do not know if they are going to have new growth until midsummer. She reflected that participating in this project in her mid to late career and in midlife is "a really interesting time to take stock, heal around something" while also seeing "what didn't grow after all. One of the feelings is, there are people I probably would have been closer to if the time after had brought us closer together." Megan concluded, "I am not the person I think I was before. I'm ok with that now." These thoughts align with the theme of wondering what might have been or who we might have been. Louisa spent time thinking about this question of who she was and researching "some weird existential questions." She concluded, "You can't be the same person you were last week. Experiences shape who we are." But Louisa added, "We're still in essence the same humans we were before." She gave a personal example of a student teacher she had in elementary school who wrote a nice comment about each student. The statement about her was that she "always makes sure everyone is included." Louisa concurred, "That is still who I am today. That part of me didn't change, that part was constant, maybe amplified by my experience at Columbine." So, while participants may experience angst with wondering who they might have been, they also acknowledge that experiences shape us as part of human existence.

Autoethnography

Like the other participants, there have been times I wonder what my life would have been like if I had not survived a school shooting. I think my anorexia was made substantially worse due to the event. While it helped numb me some and maybe helped me continue functioning well enough to do well in college and start a wonderful marriage, I wonder what those years would have been like if I had experienced more of my emotions. I continue to question my decision to become a teacher as it has become more dangerous in the United States, and wonder if I did it with some level of duty once I accepted the Dave Sanders scholarship. I grew up in Christian churches and had been baptized twice, once shortly before the shooting. In my senior

year of high school, I was co-editor-in-chief of our high school paper, and I did mention God in my monthly column. I wore a WWJD? (What Would Jesus Do?) bracelet, went to the yearly See You at The Pole prayer around the flag pole, and joined the Bible club. I wondered if my quiet way of being respectful in class, not cursing, and being kind was enough of a witness to my faith in Jesus. After the shooting, the narrative of Cassie Bernall's death due to her Christian faith rocked my faith and my world. Cassie was a junior at Columbine at the time of the shooting, and the narrative of her death was controversial. Immediately following the shooting, it was understood that Cassie had been asked if she was a Christian by the shooters, and when she said "Yes," she was shot and killed. Later, another girl who was shot and survived said that she had made that statement, and not Cassie. Regardless of what happened in the library that day, a martyr narrative emerged around Cassie's death. People made statements about the survivors being saved for something meaningful. But this led me to wonder if that also meant that God allowed the others to die for some purpose. Mostly, I felt convicted of not sharing my faith openly enough and used my last newspaper column to specifically share my faith in Jesus as my savior, see Appendix A. I have spent the last 24 years wrestling with the idea of what a martyr is, if God requires me to be willing to die for my faith, and what it means if I am not willing to die for my faith. Over the years, the story of Cassie became more complicated as eyewitnesses said she was not the one who answered yes to being a Christian before she was killed. But Cassie led a life of faith, and for me, that is enough. I am sickened by the narrative her church and other churches used of martyrdom after the shooting. Now, as a practicing Mennonite and Quaker, I continue to wrestle with the stories of martyrdom that are part of these faith traditions. I see them as being distinct from an overly sensationalized account of a young girl's murder, but I still experience a lot of philosophical angst with the idea of dying for my faith. Re-reading my last newspaper column made me sad; see Appendix A. I felt incredible pain for my teenage self. I was the victim. I did not need to die for my faith. I imagine this will continue to be a topic that challenges me in my faith and what it means to believe in God.

Anger and Blame

Surviving the Columbine shooting brought up feelings of anger for many participants as they looked for someone to blame. Some shared how the anger and blame have shifted and changed over the years. Anne emoted, "I vacillate between just pure rage and fear and compassion and forgiveness. It's been such a cyclical journey, I continue to be on. It intensifies, as I reach different milestones and as my kids reach different milestones." As already shared, some participants expressed their feelings toward Sue Klebold and

the other parents of the shooters as it pertained to their parenting, but they were also mentioned in general with regard to the topic of anger and blame. Louisa said that she had no interest in reading Sue Klebold's book and had never blamed the parents, "not that they shouldn't know something." All of her anger was always directed toward the media "for better or for worse." When questioned about the totality of "all of my anger" and if that also included Eric and Dylan, Louisa contemplated:

> It's not like I forgave them. I don't know what that actually means in this context, this situation. I know what the word means. They are the ones who did it. I can be mad at somebody who's dead. I guess I was. I was never mad at them as people, I was mad at what they did.

Louisa said, "We grew up with Dylan." This theme repeated with other participants as they tried to make sense of growing up with classmates who then wanted to murder all of us and succeeded in murdering some of us. Rachel shared how she and Dylan were at Governor's Ranch Elementary School for third to sixth grades as part of a magnet program for gifted students called Chips. She described it as a program for smart kids who were not thriving in a typical classroom, stating, "The smart kids who were doing great at school didn't go to Chips. A lot of what we did was to build social skills." Going deeper, Rachel commented, "My connection with Dylan is deep in some ways." Goldie recalled that her mom babysat Dylan and his brother when she was in elementary school. She commented, "We were kids. He was that overly smart kid in elementary school, a little beyond you." Anne talked about the response to the Columbine shooting of schools having lockdowns, locked doors, and student badges. She protested, "That would not have worked for us, at Columbine. I can get really riled up about this. Students have to wear their student badges, all the doors are locked. Great, Eric and Dylan belonged there." This theme of anger toward, yet recognizing the shooters' place with us, continued as participants turned the anger and blame on themselves. Claire reflected,

> We're trying to find some kind of answers in our lives. How did that happen in our community, with our school, our classmates.? What did I not see being a classmate of theirs? … What could I have done differently?

Louisa has been asked if she has any regrets, anything she could have done differently. She responded, "I don't know if anything could have made a difference … My advice for that question is to be kind to everyone. You don't want to have to live with that regret for the rest of your lives." She also acknowledged that in her work with the nonprofit group, at first, she avoided communicating with Columbine parents who lost a child because "I felt too

guilty. I still feel guilty." Anne summed up the complex emotions surrounding anger and blame that participants put on themselves revealing:

> We were so young when this happened. Part of me feels like, we should have fought harder to get laws changed then. The time for change was then. I have grace for us, I hold those two things in tension. Sometimes I feel so guilty and angry, should have stormed things … maybe our world would be different now. Every time there's another shooting, I feel guilt and responsibility even though it's not rational. It carries over to my children, and then every child, and every parent and caregiver. I just hate that my kids live in this world.

Some participants expressed their anger with gun laws and access to guns. While Matthew stated that he understands people's need for safety and protecting themselves, he said "We've taken it too far. Civilians owning weapons of war is wrong. People think the Second Amendment is untouchable." He added, "There has to be some kind of compromise in our country where we stop people from killing each other, and you keep your guns in some way." Claire's husband is in the military, and while their family does not own a gun, she stated that the military is vast and needs all kinds of different people. She said when they moved back to Colorado, she saw someone carry a gun for the first time, and it was alarming to her. Claire is trying not to judge people's choice to carry a gun stating, "I'm trying to open my eyes to there's a whole world out there. What is the exact problem we're having?" For Matthew, the problem is clear, and he blames school shootings on access to guns. Although he spoke about reaching a compromise about people owning guns, he also stated, "I will celebrate the day the Second Amendment is repealed." Matthew continued:

> I think about Sandy Hook, Uvalde, elementary schools, people who are vulnerable, and then our country doing absolutely nothing. If nothing changed after Sandy Hook, then this country isn't going to do anything different … This is the life we have chosen for ourselves, the society we have chosen for ourselves. We have gotten to a point in our country where we value our guns more than our own children's lives. If we're going to worship our weapons of war over our own lives, this is screwed up … The last thing I want to do is lose my life to someone who has more right to a weapon of war than my own life.

Autoethnography

My first reaction of anger and blame was toward Eric and Dylan and their families and friends. I made a clear distinction in my mind between victims and perpetrators and saw no blurring of the line. I refused to include Eric

and Dylan's names as victims in the last issue of the high school newspaper, and I was in agreement with the decision by the administration not to include their names in the graduation program. I could not imagine how their parents could not have known something was wrong. And I was furious with the media's presence and interference with our grieving. On the day after the shooting, we congregated in Clement Park next to the school to make an account of who was alive and who had died. As we found out the news and people had fierce reactions, the media were in our faces. One media person said, "This is not just about you." I felt infuriated by that statement. Some of my friends learned that if you flipped off the camera, the images would not be used. As students found out who had been injured or murdered, other friends would make a shield around them to keep them from being photographed or videoed. My feelings about the media remain complicated. While I understand that event was one of the first of its kind, the media's presence that day also changed how we think about and portray school shootings. But the media did not cause the shooting that day. I have already written about my shift in perspective on Eric and Dylan's parents. After feeling guilty for wanting them to grieve alone, I swung to the other extreme and focused on feeling sorry for them. I also saw Eric and Dylan as victims in a different sense due to mental illness. While it is important for me to remember their humanity, I have regained some anger toward them. They really did want to murder me that day, and it is justifiable for me to be angry about that and hurt, and sad.

Fear of the Future and the Unknown

Many participants expressed the feeling of the future being unknown and not trusting that good is possible. Rachel explained that she has "a lot of practice living with the expectation that I don't know what is going to happen, and that tomorrow might never come. It's just been more than half a life of not really trusting the future." Jamie declared, "I don't inherently trust people, I assume they have mal intent for me. I don't have an accurate assessment of safe situations." Rachel commented, "Having a disrupted sense of personal safety--an inability to trust that I'm ever safe--also leads to a heightened sense of how much I trust everybody." She added, "I can see that anyone could choose to drive down the wrong side of the highway … I can see that I am usually, even always, trusting people not to do that kind of thing." Anne stated, "I'm scared … I live with a lot of anxiety and fear because where other people say that would never happen, that it is the thing that happens, the thing that you never thought would happen." Rachel mused, "There's something to being shattered, the different ways that people experienced trauma for the first time." She found a lot of solace from her church friends immediately after the shooting, partly because they had

personal experiences with their own trauma. Rachel stated, "They were in some ways less surprised. They already knew a lot about not being able to count on the world."

Understanding it as a One-time Event

While some participants shared how understanding the Columbine shooting as a one-time event influenced their career decision, others expressed it in a broader philosophical way. In our second interview, Matthew informed me that speaking to me in the first meeting caused him to reach out to his friends to see how they were doing, specifically with the trauma of the shooting. He said they had an interesting conversation around the idea that "We were told as kids this would never happen again. How are we supposed to deal with that?" Anne explained how she understood that the Columbine shooting was not the first school shooting, but it felt like it was the first. She added, "Even when it happened, I think we all felt like this was a one-off. Nobody thought this is going to be a pattern of school shootings. This awful thing happened here and to us." This is no longer how participants understand school shootings, as we continue to see an increase.

Making Them More Empathetic

Many of the participants believed that surviving the Columbine shooting has increased their empathy and understanding of other people's grief and trauma. Louisa explained, "When my students are going through it, whatever it is, I can be compassionate … People who have experienced the level of trauma we have can maybe tap into it a little bit faster or easier." Anne shared, "I experience the world in a very empathetic way and see other perspectives and points of view … I feel really connected to other people who have experienced loss or tragedy." Rachel agreed stating, "I do think it has made me more able to accept other people's grief when that grief makes them impossible humans, and they don't act like they should act." Megan saw an increase in students exhibiting negative behaviors and trauma in her last years as a preschool teacher. Due to the trauma of growing up with an abusive father and surviving the Columbine shooting, she felt, "I kind of understand their brain." Matthew tells any school and the students where he works that he is a survivor because "I don't want that to be a touchy subject, rumors going around. I had a traumatic experience. If anything comes up, they know they can talk to me." Elizabeth acknowledged that surviving the shooting has given her more empathy but also more anxiety and fear. Claire commented that she really enjoys working with preschool children and thinks listening to them and being patient with them are fundamental. She said, "A lot of adults don't seem to do that. I think a little has to do with

what we went through, I wanted to help in some way." Jamie expressed, "I think I have more empathy for people and would like to hope that I would have been like that anyhow." While participants see the connection to surviving the Columbine shooting and their ability to empathize with others, they also recognize the fear and anxiety that also come with this trauma.

Autoethnography: Fear of the Future and Empathy

I am an anxious person and have been since childhood, but I am more anxious since the shooting. I worry that something terrible might happen to my children or husband. Part of our decision to move to New Zealand was due to increasing gun violence in US schools.

I definitely did not expect there to be more school shootings after Columbine. While there have not been any that are quite the same with the year-long planning and planted bombs, the number of school shootings continues to increase. After the Parkland shooting, the student movement used #Enough as their slogan. I wore the shirt on the day I gave a speech at the student rally, and I felt angry. I was outraged that it was not enough after the Columbine shooting for gun laws to change. I continue to be furious as the body count rises of dead children in schools while lawmakers and politicians pretend that they have any plans to make significant gun reform.

I think I am a more relational teacher and am more highly attuned to kindness and bullying due to surviving the shooting. But I was already aware of people around me who were hurting or in need before the shooting, so I do not know if I can say the shooting made me more empathetic for sure, but I believe that it did. I cannot tolerate unkindness or bullying when I see it in my classroom or with my own children. I have stepped in when my children have experienced racist bullying. And when my children have been bullies, I have talked with them about their actions and other people's feelings and expected them to make amends.

How it Affected Their Memories of High School

While it was not a major category, the idea of how the shooting impacted memories of high school was important. Anne shared that between our first and second interviews, she reflected on how much the timing of the shooting affected her. She was at the end of her junior year on the day of the shooting and finished one more year after the traumatic event. Anne pointed out that it was the end of my high school experience since she and I were good friends at the time of the shooting. She explained how it was a different experience for her stating, "It's all just so tainted for me … I can't separate the happy memories from the trauma. It's all just interwoven. There's just so much that I don't remember." Megan also spoke about the timing of the shooting.

She graduated in 1999 and has worked with another survivor who graduated in 20002. Megan stated, "I had four really great years at Columbine, one shitty day, and then two weeks of why are we still at Chatfield? … She only had until April and then three years of anger." Megan and Anne both recognized that it was also difficult for the senior class to graduate right after the shooting and not still be there and connected with the other survivors. To begin the 1999–2000 school year, Principal Frank DeAngelis held a rally in the parking lot to "take back the school." Anne remarked, "The next year when we went back into the building, the rally. I've thought about your class, and you and (Clara, my high school best friend) didn't come back, what that would have felt like." Megan shared how she had some jealousy with the welcome and other things that returning students got that the 1999 graduating class did not get. She stated, "I know Frank (DeAngelis) feels horrible about it, but he shouldn't." While she shared how the timing of the shooting allowed her to have mostly good memories of high school, it also affected how she processed the trauma. Megan expressed, "It was unfortunate we got shoved out into the world" with the message "You got this. We believe." Goldie shared a similar experience of feeling left out due to graduating in 1999. She helped get the last issue of the literary magazine published by calling a paper company and getting the paper donated. The student body was invited to create something for the literary magazine, which for Goldie was a way "to encourage other people's healing through art." The following summer, some students put on an art show using the magazine, but Goldie was not included. She said, "That also kind of contributed a little bit to my loneliness." Goldie also stated that the shooting left a lot of things feeling "unfinished," which was symbolized in the piece of art that she brought to the interview. She had made a sculpture, seen in Figure 8.11, before the shooting that remained in items that were removed from the crime scene

Figure 8.11 Goldie's Elicitation Item. An art sculpture started before the day of the shooting. Photograph by Goldie.

Figure 8.12 Elizabeth's Elicitation Item. An ornament for the victims who lost their lives in the shooting. Photograph by Elizabeth.

until she came back for it a year or two later. Goldie reflected, "It has a lot of change in it, metaphorically I'd like it to represent that, peace." The item that Elizabeth brought to share, as seen in Figure 8.12, was a metal angel cutout that says "believe in angels" she got after the shooting. She reflected, "We talked about those kids being our angels for so long" referring to the 12 students who died in the shooting. The remainder of her high school career was heavily shaped by the shooting and the loss of classmates and a teacher.

Autoethnography

I can relate to the other participants who graduated with me in 1999. There were times when I felt left out of the grieving process at Columbine, but I was also relieved to not be part of the new trauma that occurred in the following years, and the constant media attention and visiting tourists. I had many good experiences at Columbine with great teachers and friends. When I went to college, a girl told me that she felt sorry for my experience because she knew what it was like to be scared at school every day. I told her that I had never really been scared at school until that day and that I felt sorry that she

had experienced fear at school. Even during the data collection for this project, I shared with participants how I had enjoyed our class and thought we had gotten along so much better than the class that graduated the year before us in 1998. I described us as getting along well among the different groups, even if we were not good friends. I realized this statement was ridiculous since two of our classmates tried to kill everyone at our school. While I felt accepted and fairly comfortable at school, this was obviously not the case for everyone. And while Eric and Dylan may not have been bullied like the media portrayed, they did not have the same high school experience that I did.

"We're No Different than Non-survivors in the Workforce"

In the first round of interviews, Megan shared how in a recent job interview she let the employer know she is a Columbine survivor with PTSD and compounding trauma, and she does not work on April 20th. The next statement she made was, "We're no different than non-survivors in the workforce, I don't think." This complex statement led me to ask the participants to respond to the statement for themselves in our second interview. Some participants fundamentally disagreed with this statement. A few thought that how others view them is distinct due to their survivor status, while others felt that they are different due to the trauma of surviving the shooting. Others agreed with the statement and saw themselves as the same as other teachers who bring their complexities and trauma to the classroom without it affecting their job. In general, participants agreed that they are like non-survivor teachers and are competent at their jobs, but do experience trauma related to the shooting, which sets them apart.

Jamie said that on paper, she is just like any other teacher, but people look at her differently. She said, "I think my peers look at me with pity." Matthew shared feelings of not being supported by administrators commenting, "We obviously have this experience. But what most employers kind of don't understand, is we need our own kind of support behind it. They don't know how to handle it." Unlike Jamie and Matthew, Erin has always felt supported by her administration and stated, "There have been some days where I needed to take time off, and of course, they were like take it off." While Goldie does not like announcing her survivor status, she does share it at school because she thinks she can share something about the school environment. She expressed, "I don't want them to pity me and stare at me … If they knew I took April 20th off … I would feel heard, not guilty for taking that day off and dealing with my trauma." Claire stated, "Of course, we are different. We're going to be different than the standard teacher. We look at things a lot differently," But for her, that does not mean that she needs any work accommodations. Matthew shared, "Really the only accommodation I've ever needed is for admin to tell me there's a fire drill coming up. There are those

administrators that say, 'You won't take it seriously.' I'm in my 30s. I will take it seriously." Megan shared that she was treated "with kid gloves" by her school for the first lockdown drill. She added, "I told them I just need ice, something fuzzy to hold, earphones. I'm not with kids. As long as I'm focused, I'm fine, and then I take the moments that I need to." Anne observed:

> What I hear in that statement is the desire to not be defined by this event. And I agree with that, I also don't want to be this event that happened when I was 16 years old. Also because of that event I do have some really unique responses and perspectives that I think are a gift to any sort of public environment in which I work and which brings some complexities to the environments in which I work.

Louisa expanded on the theme of the complexity of the trauma being related to the school setting stating, "I have considered getting ADA for PTSD or things that are really hard to handle. That's like anybody trying to get ADA in the workforce." But when asked about how it might be different to colleagues who have non-school-related trauma, she admitted, "I guess it kind of amplifies the frequency of potential triggers." Abby also raised an important point about the increasing number of teachers and community members who are affected by school shootings. She commented, "I don't agree with the statement 100%, but I definitely think everybody has their own trauma and story and connection to Columbine or even another shooting." Anne made a similar remark, acknowledging the many difficulties people face in life. She pointed out, "In that way, I don't know that any person, in general, is just a 'normal person in the workplace.' We're all just carrying things around with us in weird ways."

It was also common for participants to defend their ability to do their job well. Jamie stated, "I can perform the role, and clearly I'm good at the job" as evidenced by her current role as a trainer of other teachers. Megan did not remember making the first statement but reflected in our second interview, "I can do my job just as well as someone who has not survived a mass shooting. I am capable of running a classroom." She followed this statement by explaining how trauma does affect her in the classroom sharing, "If I hear something on the news, especially if it's a school, I feel like I have to work extra hard to stay calm, cool, and collected." Megan also acknowledged that she keeps grounding items in her desk and car, items such as "something fuzzy to hold, earphones," and "things that a non-survivor doesn't have." She acknowledged that the trauma of the shooting adds complexity to her role in education, but announced, "I'm not a bad person. I'm not broken." Megan concluded, "In a sense, I'm kind of proud of who I am and how far I've come. I can do this job. Some days are hard." Both statements can be true for the participants.

Autoethnography

When Megan made this statement, I disagreed with her in my head. She had listed things that made her different in the workforce. But I also recognized her desire to explain that she is good at her job and was proud of how much progress she's made. I am different in the workforce. I experience a level of trauma in the school setting that non-survivors do not experience. I am more attuned to bullying and school safety than many of my colleagues. This creates challenges and strengths for me as a teacher. I have never asked for April 20th off from work. I have let my schools know that I am a survivor. Some of my schools have given me advance warnings about lockdown drills, but I did not know that fire drills are actually more disconcerting for me. Just like the other participants, there are hard days because I am a Columbine survivor in a school, and I am good at my job. Both statements can be true for me.

Discussion

The results of the research show how profoundly the participants experience trauma after surviving the Columbine shooting professionally, personally, physically, and philosophically. The question is not "how do" they experience trauma but rather "how do they not" experience trauma?

Participants had a wide range of reasons and experiences that led them to teach as a profession. While a few were influenced by the shooting either positively or negatively toward teaching, no one expressed a major influence from the shooting on their initial decision to become a teacher. However, all the participants encountered trauma in their professional careers due to the shooting. Some participants are keenly aware of their physical settings and are always on high alert in their classroom to be ready for an active shooter. They confessed that they would ignore school safety protocols that they did not think were safe and go with their own ideas. This demonstrates the depth of the trauma they still face and also the unwillingness of the administration to listen to their ideas. Fire and active shooter drills are a source of repeated trauma for participants. The research indicates that schools need to adopt survivor-informed school safety policies and procedures and that there is a lack of knowledge about best practices for lockdown drills. Participants have been berated and ignored for their ideas and accused of not taking an active shooter drill seriously. This behavior from administrators is unkind, unacceptable, and unnecessary. The participants demonstrated that they desire to keep themselves and their students safe to a degree that may be more than their non-survivor colleagues, and that safety is a key aspect of their teaching profession. The research also highlights that many participants experience trauma with their children in the school setting. As already indicated in the research, having more candid conversations and including

survivors in school safety discussions might help eliminate some of this stress. But the research shows that participants understand the school setting to be potentially traumatic due to their experience of surviving the Columbine shooting.

In addition to professional trauma, participants experience a vast amount of personal trauma due to the shooting. This is evidenced in the "survivor's guilt" that many participants still feel 24 years later, and the complex nature of gratitude for people in their lives. The discussion about feeling grateful for being alive was very fruitful and shed light on a common misconception by non-survivors that is propagated by the media. Participants are overwhelmingly grateful that they are alive. But this feeling is tempered by the loss of classmates, the length of time since the initial traumatic event, and anger with the question itself from non-survivors. Participants were also grateful for the care and support they experienced after the shooting, which gave them hope. The relationships that some participants maintained with their Columbine teachers were influenced by the trauma of the shooting. One participant lost a relationship when she asked the teacher to talk to her about the shooting for a college paper. Others began doing nonprofit and advocacy work with their former teachers around mass shootings and trauma. And a few stay in touch with the teachers they hid with on the day of the shooting. These changed relationships were due to the shooting and are not the usual teacher–student relationships that are maintained after high school. One of the ways that participants were greatly influenced by the shooting was in their parenting. The stress, anxiety, and fear that participants feel surrounding parenting were evident in the depth of their statements. They fear their children will be involved in a school shooting either as those harmed or the ones doing the harm. They worry about the toys their children play with and how this will influence their children. They have anxiety on a daily basis when they drop them off at school. And one participant is so afraid of school shootings and the state of the world that he has chosen not to have his own children. The Columbine shooting is a daily source of trauma with regard to parenting for the participants. When participants discussed parenting as it pertained to Eric and Dylan's parents, the idea that parenting is difficult came up. While some participants still think the shooters' parents should have been more aware of their sons' mental status, and plans, quite a bit of forgiveness and grace was shown toward them, especially toward Sue Klebold. It is interesting that the majority of the conversations focused on her. This might be due to her public advocacy and willingness to be in public and share her story. Also, while Abby mentioned Eric's dad and his possible willingness to seek help for Eric, the fathers are mostly absent from the discussion. The research indicates that participants are aware that school shootings are a peculiarly male problem, yet they did not discuss the fathers' role. And most of the participants were women

talking about their impact on their children. Participants expressed what appeared to be a deep-seated fear of being the parents of a school shooter and wanting to raise kind children, and being aware of what is going on with their children.

The physical toll that the shooting took on participants was unexpected. This is due, in part, to my unawareness of the extent to which the shooting traumatized me physically. Even in acknowledging the impact it had on them physically, participants still minimized this aspect and had survivor's guilt about the feelings they experienced. Participants used phrases such as "super high functioning," "lucky," "Did some drugs, but nothing too dangerous," "developed an eating disorder, yes dangerous but was able to get out of it," and "It still kind of haunts me that I didn't feel anything." Some participants referenced Bessel van der Kolk's (2014) book, *The Body Keeps the Score*, which explains the physiological changes trauma causes. I also brought it up with participants to discuss what I was learning from the book and to see if they had similar experiences. Megan's story of attempting death by suicide and other stories of classmates who died by suicide in the years following the shooting remind us that school shootings take an immense toll on the entire person. Trauma resources need to address this early on with school shooting survivors. As Rachel said, "Yoga is not just for fun for me." Participants recognize how the shooting impacted their bodies on the cellular level and the work that they have to do to remain stable and well.

The philosophical implications of the Columbine shooting on participants demonstrate the extent to which the trauma invades the daily lives of participants on small and large scales. From calling April 20 "the only day that matters in the whole entire calendar year" to acknowledging the constant distrust of others and fear of the future highlights the invasive nature of trauma. The research brings to light stories and experiences that are overlooked in the media and research on school shootings. Participants want readers to know how deeply the shooting impacted them, continues to impact them, and will always impact them. While acknowledging the empathy toward and connection with their students based on their trauma, participants did not support the idea that they are better people for having survived this or are grateful that they are more empathetic. They are forever changed and traumatized. And while they are amazing people doing wonderful things with their lives, the narrative does not need to shift to the positive outcomes of surviving a school shooting. There are none. Participants are thriving and flourishing despite, not due to, the Columbine shooting.

The question remains what will be the continued long-term effects of the shooting on participants, especially if school shootings continue to happen. The question about the extent to which participants are seeking help and support for their trauma was also not addressed in depth.

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9 The Way Forward

Preventing More Deaths From School Shootings in Our Schools

The results of this study expounded on the existing literature about school shootings by giving an insider positionality to the school shootings most present in the literature. Through discussions with participants, some of the connections made with the literature extend themes and beliefs already expressed, while the results also contend with the main points brought forward in the literature. Connections with the literature and the study occurred surrounding school climate, looking for answers: causes and blame, protecting and fearing children and youth/social control and symbolic violence, and possible ways of preventing school violence through mental health, trauma-informed instruction, bullying prevention, threat assessment, and RPs. The chapter also discusses the limits that teachers and parents can do to prevent school shootings without national gun reform and addressing gun control in the United States.

School Climate

Participants did not use the term school or classroom climate, but the concept was evident in the discussion we had. The focus on listening, honoring student voices, and creating a safe space physically and emotionally for their students aligns with the research on the importance of a positive school climate to possibly prevent school violence. Participants spoke about the importance of including all students and making them feel welcome, which supports the literature. Buckmaster (2016) explains that separating students acting in unsafe ways further "separates the students from their peers and creates a sense of isolation," which research shows is "an accelerator and motivator for school violence and promotes rampages at school" (p. 2). Skiba (2014) demonstrated that the exclusionary discipline's goal of making schools safer actually "appears to have negative effects on student outcomes and the learning climate" (p. 30). Responses from participants did not specifically mention zero-tolerance policies, but they described the positive, inclusive school climate that the literature supports makes for a safer school.

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Mental Health Services: What are the Warning Signs, and What Can We Do When We Notice Them?

Mental health services continue to be one of the main suggestions for preventing school violence in the literature. It was also a common theme discussed by participants of this study. Noticing warning signs early and getting mental health resources for students posing risky behavior before their behavior becomes violent were key recommendations from the study. Participants' recommendation to address mental health as a way to address school shootings aligns with the literature (Schildkraut & Nickerson, 2020; Skiba, 2014). Vossekuil et al. (2004) found that for school shooters, most offenders had suicidal ideations or attempts, or intense depression or hopelessness as opposed to other mental health diagnoses. Therefore, the best practice for addressing mental health concerns related to school shootings seems to be continued suicide prevention training. While participants recognize their role as the first line of defense for noticing warning signs or possible suicidal ideation, they point out the limit to what they can do. Participants recognized their lack of training as mental health professionals and their lack of desire to be mental health professionals in their teaching roles. While recognizing the importance of mandatory reporting for suspicious behaviors, participants delineated a boundary in the teacher–student relationships that excluded them from diagnosing or being responsible for the mental health of their students. The boundary of the role of teacher versus mental health professional needs further study in the literature, while also acknowledging the limits of mental health professionals for predicting and preventing school shootings (Metzl & MacLeish, 2015). The larger question posited by Madfis (2016) as to "why someone with a mental health issue would desire to commit a rampage attack" (p. 24) was repeated by participants in this study. The desire to know what is happening to "our boys" who disproportionately carry out school shootings, and to help raise kind and empathetic children mirrors a few people in the literature asking these deeper questions.

The literature and this study indicate that teachers need to be aware of warning signs of suicide and possible violence against others. But the literature needs to more clearly address the warning signs of school shootings, which is what threat assessment research is currently doing. The literature states that there is no consistent profile of a school shooter and that behavior rather than characteristics of a person should be used to assess possible risk (Borum et al., 2010; Madfis, 2020; Muschert & Madfis, 2014; Vossekuil et al., 2004; Warnick & Kapa, 2019). This was consistent with what the participants shared in this study. They use concerning behaviors, such as violent writing, rather than membership in a certain group or physical appearance. While the literature and the study are consistent on this matter,

more must be done to understand warning signs. More than just violent writing has to be an indicator of a possible school shooting. While threat assessment research is making advances in this area, most of the participants in this study did not mention threat assessment. They rely on "gut feelings and red flags," which are not an exact science. Participants did not discuss whether they think the relationships they have with students could lead to students sharing information with them if they are concerned about a student. Claire learned recently in a school shooting training led by a former FBI agent who was at Columbine on the day of the shooting that "75% will tell somebody what they're going to do." And Jamie shared she had a student who "threatened to kill me and my teammate. There was some threat assessment." But both of these statements were in passing and were not posited as a way to prevent violence by these participants. Anne's statement "Even if teachers are doing threat assessment it doesn't always go well" demonstrated the need for more awareness and training around this aspect of school shooting prevention. Participants do value building relationships of trust with their students, which the literature indicates is a core element for safe and effective schools (Warnick & Kapa, 2019). The study highlights the need for further literature and awareness, and training around threat assessment for teachers. But as already mentioned from the mental health aspect, participants indicated a need for a boundary in their relationships with students and the limitations of what they can do and want to do to provide more than a caring relationship and steer students toward appropriate resources.

The negative effects of trauma on learning outcomes and the classroom environment are well documented in the literature (Cavanaugh, 2016). Rishel et al. (2019) expanded on Felitti et al.'s (1998) original definition of ACEs to include school violence. The findings of this study completely agree with the inclusion of school shootings as a traumatic experience. Rishel et al.'s (2019) study of the training of teachers in ACEs and the ARC framework indicated that the training can "help teachers learn to manage their own reactions; create the sense of safety children need" (p. 242). The results of this study concurred with participants learning how to manage their trauma and the continued need to manage the trauma of surviving a school shooting. This trauma must be managed while also providing for the safety of their students and helping their students learn to regulate their own emotions and trauma. More research needs to address the effects of school shootings on teachers and what support they need to cope with their own trauma while also helping students manage their trauma. There is a gap in the literature about the shared trauma of a school shooting that affects both teachers and students. More should be researched about the effect of trauma on the teacher–student relationship and the classroom environment.

Columbine Survivors Address Bullying and Mental Health at Columbine in 1999: Bullying is Insidious and Has No Place in Schools, But it May Surprise You to Learn Many School Shooters Were the Bullies, Not the Ones Bullied

Participants continue to look for causes and for who was to blame for the Columbine shooting, but in ways that differ from current literature. While study participants recognized that there was bullying at Columbine and that warning signs about violent writing could have been taken more seriously, the idea of blaming the victims was fiercely rejected. Hong et al. (2011) state, "Teachers' apathetic response to students' bullying situations has also been blamed for the shooting at Columbine … Although teachers generally hold negative views toward bullying, they expressed lack of confidence in their ability to mitigate bullying situations" (p. 864). While participants support the idea that Columbine teachers could have done more to address bullying and affirm that it existed in 1999, they staunchly reject blaming the teachers for the shooting. The language of blaming victims came through as offensive and inaccurate. The literature often cites mental health as a cause of school shootings, and participants advocated for mental health resources for students. At the same time, the results of this study extend the discussion of mental health to discuss the lack of mental health awareness in the 1990s. Participants rejected judging the lack of mental health services with a "post-Columbine" lens, acknowledging that the Columbine shooting made the literature aware of the lack of mental health awareness in the United States. At the same time, findings from this study suggest that Eric and Dylan received more mental health attention than the general population at Columbine. They were "on the radar" for risky and criminal behavior, and received services that were considered appropriate at the time to handle deviant youth behavior.

While the media narrative immediately following the Columbine shooting listed bullying of the shooters as one of the main causes of the shooting, the literature does not support this claim about Eric and Dylan (Cullen, 2009). The literature on bullying as it relates to school shootings in general is contradictory (Leary et al., 2003; Vossekuil et al., 2004; Warnick et al., 2015), citing school shooters to be as likely to be bullies as to be bullied. There is also conflicting literature on the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs (Ferguson et al., 2007; Gaffney et al., 2021). Similar contradictions were present in what participants shared about bullying. While some focus on addressing bullying and making sure students feel included, Abby felt like the idea of anti-bullying has gone too far in schools to now ensure all students spend time with all other students. More research needs to address the interaction between inclusion and anti-bullying in schools and their effects on the school environment. While participants admit that bullying happened

at Columbine when we were students and that teachers could have done more to address it, no one blamed the teachers for the shooting. But Madfis (2015) found that rampage shootings were more common when teachers or administrators did not address bullying. The message from participants, though, was that bullying does not justify murdering students at school.

If bullying is a factor in school shootings, then schools would be wise to adopt RPs, as Buckmaster's (2016) review of some schools using RJ showed a reduction in bullying. The literature on the use of RPs to prevent school shootings is in its nascent state. This project and my future research will add to the literature. The findings from this study indicate that participants value relationships of trust with their students and prioritize this aspect of teaching. A few participants gave specific examples of using RPs with their schools, discussing how it can help teach empathy and the value they see in using it. Louisa's question of why teachers need to be trained in treating students well is important in the literature. While one would hope that teachers are naturally caring toward their students, the philosophy of RJ is fundamentally different from the power structure that usually defines schools in the United States. Noddings (2012) describes the caring nature of the teacher–student relationship that is, by nature, unequal. She emphasizes the importance of the carer meeting expressed needs and not assumed needs. This answers Louisa's question about why teachers need training in RPs. The need for training in RJ, supported by Hollweck et al. (2019) and the need to address implicit bias and institutional racism (Davis, 2019) also appeared in the findings from this study. Louisa spoke about being aware of the white-savior complex that she must work against in herself when she works with mostly minority students. The lack of discussion from participants about RPs or RJ indicates the need for more discussions with teachers about how the philosophy of RJ can build the classroom climate through healthy relationships and ways of repairing harm that can potentially prevent school shootings.

Protecting and Fearing Children and Youth, Social Control and Symbolic Violence

Participants discussed the idea of both protecting and fearing their students. Megan's story of being threatened by all of her preschool students while also being called mom highlights the complexity of the teacher–student relationship. The need for boundaries in this relationship expressed by participants, also indicated the duality of students being seen as those who need protection and those to be feared. While some participants contended that the safety of their students is their number one priority and is the most important job of a teacher, this belief did not justify arming teachers. None of the participants supported teachers being armed as a solution to school shootings. They also asked the question posed by Warnick and Kapa (2019) of

how arming a teacher would change the student–teacher relationship. Altheide (2009) pointed out that when the role of teachers is one of surveillance and discipline, student behaviors are measured on the same scale as terroristic acts. In addition to what the literature describes as teachers fearing students, participants suggested that teachers also wield disproportionate power in the classroom. This aligns with the literature discussing social control and symbolic violence in the classroom. Warnick et al.'s (2015) definition of violence "as an exertion of force to change the environment," means that "schools are fundamentally places of violence" (p. 375). Participants recognized the inherent power teachers have in the teacher–student relationship and recommended the need for awareness of their role, how often they speak in spaces where they are in the majority, and the propensity to be a "white savior" to students of Color. There was also the discussion of some teachers making bad decisions and abusing their power over students. The literature needs to extend the discussion about fear in the classroom when discussing arming teachers to include the aspect of social control that occurs in the classroom with the unbalanced power teachers inherently have and the unpredictable nature of classrooms. The use of lockdown drills was also addressed in the literature and in this study. Participants labeled lockdown drills as "sad but necessary" in the current state of access to firearms in the United States. The conflicting message seen in the literature about balancing the necessity for lockdown drills with the trauma they may cause was echoed in this study. Schildkraut and Nickerson (2020) highlight the lack of research into the psychological effects of lockdown drills or best practices despite schools implementing them in every US state. Participants also questioned the effect of lockdowns on their students and their own children, hoping that they would learn the basics of safety without being too traumatized by the drill. There is a gap in the literature about the effects of lockdowns on school shooting survivors and best practices that are survivor-informed for school safety. The literature also suggests that training students in lockdown procedures will help them plan future shootings since they know the protocols for the school and are often students themselves (Densley, 2019). Schildkraut and Nickerson (2020) refute this concern by explaining that a locked door is a deterrent to a school shooter, so even if a student knew the protocols of the school, they would not be able to breach a locked door. The results of this study indicate that there may be a more fundamental problem with the lockdown drills. One participant suggested that lockdown drills not only help a potential student perpetrator learn the safety procedures, but the lockdowns themselves also instill a desire to act out a school shooting based on the excitement and thrill they cause in some students. The literature needs to address best practices for lockdown drills that are similar to how schools teach about suicide prevention, and this study should be included when discussing best practices.

Responsibility of Parents

Blaming Eric and Dylan's parents received attention both in the literature and from participants. Lickel et al. (2003) looked at how people perceived the parents of the shooters as worthy of blame based on media accounts of the shooting. The literature discussed an understanding of collective responsibility by discussing a commission, where someone helps make a blameworthy incident possible, versus omission, where a person neglects to stop the act from occurring. The results of this study found that participants struggled with the role of Eric and Dylan's parents in the shooting but ultimately did not blame them for the shooting. They expanded the conversation to discuss the complexities of parenting, recognizing that their parents did engage in social services for their children, and ultimately declaring that Eric and Dylan were the ones responsible for murdering our classmates and teacher. This study also found that while participants recognize the role of parents in knowing their children and getting them help when they recognize a problem, parents do not always have enough resources or access to services.

Addressing the Need for National Gun Reform and the Culture of Violence in the United States

One major finding in this study that is glaringly absent in the literature is the role of access to guns in school shootings. Muschert (2007) compiled the reasons suggested by the literature in social sciences for school shootings, and then included an asterisk at the bottom naming the single commonality in all school shootings as access to firearms, as seen in Table 9.1. Leary et al. (2003) conjecture, "Individuals who not only have access to guns but who are fascinated by firearms and explosives may be more likely to act on their aggressive impulses" while also countering themselves with, "however; the perpetrator of the West Paducah, Kentucky shooting had apparently not fired a gun before his rampage" (p. 211). This confirms Muschert's (2007) conclusion of access to firearms is key. The lack of discussion and importance given to this topic in the literature was called out by participants in this study. While recognizing the complexity of school shootings and the role teachers and schools have in creating safe spaces for students, they definitely wanted to discuss the role of guns being the one aspect that is to blame for school shootings.

The need for gun reform at the national level was a major finding from this study. Participants are aware of the very limited control they have over their own safety and the safety of their students in their classroom. They overwhelmingly rejected the idea of arming teachers as a solution to school shootings and called for changes to laws that make gun access so easy. Until the US government radically changes access to guns, school shootings will continue.

Table 9.1 Causes of School Shootings Suggested in Social Science Studies

Level	*Category*	*Specific contributing causes*
Individual causes and qualities	Mental illness	Depression, suicidal tendencies, and mixed personality disorder (McGee and DeBernardo, 1999, 2002; Harding et al., 2003; Harter et al., 2003; Sullivan and Guerette, 2003)
		Fixation on fantasy and weapons, including violent media (Meloy et al., 2001)
	Identity of shooters	Shootings frequently perpetrated by males (Mai and Alpert, 2000; Neroni, 2000; Newman, 2004; Spiegel and Alpert, 2000)
		Shootings frequently perpetrated by whites (Schiele and Stewart, 2001)
	Access to guns*	Individual access to firearms and weapons (Newman, 2004)
	Peer relationships	Romantic rejection (Klein, 2005)
		Victim of bullying (Burgess et al., 2006; Harter et al., 2003; Kimmel and Mahler, 2003; Klein, 2006; Larkin, 2007; Leary et al., 2003; Meloy et al., 2001; Newman, 2004)
		Social marginalization of perpetrator (Newman, 2004)
	Familial neglect or abuse	Troubled home situation (Fox et al., 2003; Newman, 2004; Webber, 2002)
Community contexts	Local youth social dynamics	Exclusionary youth peer group dynamic (Lickel et al., 2003; Sandler and Alpert, 2000)
		Intergroup conflict (Hagan et al., 2003; Larkin, 2007)
	School contexts	Poor quality of student/faculty relationship (McLaughlin et al., 2002)
	Community cohesion	Tightly knit communities may suppress response to delinquency (Newman, 2004)
		Deracinated communities may be incapable of responding to delinquency (Larkin, 2007)
	Community climate	Intolerant community climate (Aronson, 2004; Tonso, 2003; Larkin, 2007)

(*Continued*)

Table 9.1 (Continued)

Level	*Category*	*Specific contributing causes*
Social and cultural contexts	Educational	Crisis in youth culture educational institutions, especially public schools (Catlaw, 2000; Cook, 2000; Jacobs, 2002)
		States that allow corporal punishment in schools (Arcus, 2002)
	Masculinity	Masculine roles may "script" violent behaviors in boys (Mai and Alpert, 2000; Neroni, 2000; Newman, 2004; Spiegel and Alpert, 2000)
	Political climate	Shootings have occurred more frequently in US states that are politically conservative (Kimmel and Mahler, 2003)
		Shootings have occurred more frequently in areas with a strong conservative religious population (Arcus, 2002)
	Culture of violence	Widespread availability and acceptance of guns (Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2001; Lawrence and Birkland, 2004; Webber, 2002)
		Violence in media such as glorifying violence or sparking copycat crimes (Larkin, 2007; Sullivan and Guerette, 2003; Webber, 2002, 25–43)

* Access to guns is the only cause that appears in every school shooting case, and is a necessary prerequisite for a school shooting. All other causes appear with varying frequencies and intensities in individual incidents.

Adapted from Muschert (2007, Table 2). Table recreated with Muschert's permission.

As this study found, participants recognize that despite lockdown drills and school safety features and building relationships of trust with their students, access to guns increases the likelihood of school shootings occurring.

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10 Conclusion

Having a Space for School Shooting Survivors to Share Stories and Talk about the Experience With Other Survivors

For Columbine survivors who went on to become teachers, this study highlighted the importance of having a space to share stories and talk about the experience with other survivors. This specific subset of Columbine survivors could benefit from being part of regular discussions about their professional careers and how the shooting continues to influence what they do in the classroom. The results of this book indicate that participants benefited from having deeper discussions about how their trauma impacts and influences their professional lives and their whole lives.

This book focused on the phenomenological experience of Columbine High School shooting survivors who went on to become teachers. The results indicated that the participants were profoundly affected and influenced by surviving the shooting. While there were a range of responses to the trauma, participants all shared ways that it has affected them professionally, personally, physically, and philosophically. While some of the outcomes would be considered positive, such as gratitude for people in their lives and more empathy, the results also indicated that these may have been outcomes regardless of surviving the shooting. The overwhelming majority of the results experienced by participants were negative and disruptive to their lives.

Participants and I felt a sense of healing and accomplishment by participating in this study. They expressed their gratitude to me for the project and for the opportunity to share their stories and have their voices heard. The theme of honoring voices was also a theme related to how participants build relationships with their students. As intended, this study allowed participants to share stories and matters that are important to them and to create an image of themselves that is more in-depth than media representations and the current research on the Columbine shooting. I felt grateful to hear about the work they do to make the world a more beautiful place and to talk about how trauma has affected us and what we do to work to be stable and well.

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The overwhelming details and results coming from this qualitative phenomenological study suggest that having a space for school shooting survivor educators to discuss their personal and professional careers in the context of research offers a way of healing and hope for participants. Many had spoken to the media or been active in advocacy work or supporting other survivors, but this study highlighted the need for survivors to add to the research on school shootings with their own experiences and suggestions.

The nature of the study led to a deep level of participation due to the trauma that participants and I shared and the bond I had with many of them personally. Participants were eager to take part and thanked me for my research and for asking them to be involved. The experience of sharing their stories with me led some participants to realize that while they have shared about the Columbine shooting in recent years, many had not talked with other survivors recently. This was profound for some. Even the choice of a pseudonym was important for one participant. Theresa chose the name from a Columbine teacher we both had and were greatly influenced by who died a few years after the shooting from cancer. She remarked, "Theresa Miller was incredible. I was thinking about her today. I was missing her. I had her as a senior. She touched me so much. When she passed away that was so heartbreaking."

There was very little resistance to the study. One participant only wanted to do the first interview. There was no requirement to do the second interview, but the other participants were eager to meet again. This participant also expressed discomfort when sharing an elicitation item. This may, in part, be due to the experience she had on the day of the shooting and being in the same room with Dave Sanders as he died. One participant also shared her discomfort with telling me the story of the day of the shooting because we were together on that day. It did, in fact, feel traumatic for me to hear her account of that day because she had a memory of me that was not the same as I had of myself. We talked about this, and she remarked that sharing her own story, "That actually made me worried and uncomfortable, because what if Michelle remembers it differently? What if I warped it and didn't happen that way, and I've just thought that for so long?" But we both acknowledged that the friendship we had before the day of the shooting was intensified due to sharing the trauma. Jamie said tearfully, "It will always be different with you because you know. You know and can provide a deeper sense of empathy than anyone else can." Others referenced the level of understanding I had of the school building and the day of the shooting. Theresa was explaining a section of the building, and stated, "You were at Columbine, so you know." This is both a literal and a metaphorical statement about the "knowing" that we share.

There was also a deep level of care exhibited by the participants for me as the researcher. They acknowledged the emotional toll it could take on me

and checked to make sure I was handling it well. Anne remarked, "I'm sure it's a lot, you have all of your own stories and emotions. Thanks for holding this for all this." Louisa shared a fact with me about the bombs in the commons that she regularly shares in her safety briefing presentations but realized it may have impacted me personally. She commented, "I was thinking about how you are doing these interviews, I dropped the bomb on you about the bomb in the commons and how you were dealing." The level of care shown toward me was unique due to the phenomenological nature of the study and my insider positionality.

Participants received a copy of their transcript before our second meeting. They helped co-construct the themes that they saw coming out in the data and discussed with me how our first meeting impacted them. They were eager to read the final product and see what the other participants shared.

The research impacted the context in various ways. There was a range of reactions that ensued. Some participants experienced psychological distress after our first meeting, describing "hypervigilance the remainder of the week," "a couple of dreams about shootings," and "It's been a really quiet kind of inward month. I do feel like our conversation kind of sparked that. It did take me a couple of days to bounce back." Others added books that we discussed about trauma to their reading lists. A few reached out to friends from Columbine, but none noticed any changes in the ways that they interacted with their students based on our interactions.

The research was perceived as useful, and many participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their stories. Theresa told me, "Our interview last night gave me a renewed sense of hope and purpose I wasn't expecting. It reminded me of why I chose teaching and why I care so much about my students." Some participants felt a renewed motivation to pursue some of their own passions based on my research. Goldie confessed, "I'm really proud of you, a little bit jealous, but this will push me to do this now my part and do my art therapy." Claire echoed, "You've kind of given me personal inspiration to go back to school." Sharing their stories was also viewed as useful. Goldie shared,

> The biggest thing was having the moment to share my story, you know. I don't really do that very often … I avoid it sometimes … But with you, it felt different, the purpose. I know you. You can relate.

Anne reflected, "It's been a long time since I've talked to anyone from Columbine. It was a lot different than when I talk briefly with someone else or even a therapist." Claire agreed, "It is important for me to talk about every once in a while and hear other stories and know that we're not alone in all of it." Matthew shared, "Talking to you, I thought maybe I need to see how my friends are doing." Megan stated, "It's important work. I'm glad

that you're doing it. Rachel remarked, "There could be really amazing stuff that could be written about Columbine from someone who totally gets it, but a totally different experience of it." She added:

> The thing about your project that is so amazing and so interesting that could be coming later that is not a belated study but a study of now. My therapist is thinking about sharing trauma resiliency. Your project doesn't depend on the narrative: that we're better or stronger because of it.

One of the most important outcomes of this research was the recommendations from the participants. Louisa would like to see a larger project that compares Columbine survivor teachers with non-survivor teachers. She suggested, "Maybe I'm just searching for things to justify. I think survivors are better teachers because of it." Goldie asked if I could find out about the art pieces that she helped collect for the literary magazine after the shooting, and I connected her with someone who had that information. Rachel pointed out the importance of continuing to talk about Columbine and having qualitative research about it from people who would know and be able to make sense of their experience. There was the sense that participants want this project to be published to a wider audience, so that "somebody could actually do something about it (school shootings)." Abby specifically asked me, "Like you said, no one asks your opinions (about drills and prevention) … If you could get people to stop doing these drills based on your research, that would be great." Louisa pointed out that trauma is not a hierarchy, and that we should not compare people's experiences to determine if their trauma is valid. She reminded me that this is a very important point in my research and is a recommendation I have for other research on school shootings. The discussion about not using our images in training videos and presentations was one of the most important recommendations coming out of this research.

Raising Awareness of the Support Groups Available for Survivors of Mass Shootings and the Support Group for Teacher Survivors of Mass Shootings

School shooting survivors need to be aware of the support groups available for survivors of mass shootings and the support group for teacher survivors of mass shootings as one outlet to continue having emotional conversations and offering and seeking support from other survivors.

The participants in this book were not all aware of the various support groups, and more groups have existed since the time of the interviews. Sandy Hook Promise, The Rebels Project, Trauma Survivors Network, and Survivors Empowered[1] are some of the public groups that exist to support survivors of gun violence. Rachel's Challenge and the Choose Love Movement[2] are school curricula created by people affected by school shootings. There are also

private Facebook groups that support school shootings and other mass violence survivors. Survivors need to be presented with these resources right after a school shooting, but then also reminded of them periodically, as their needs for support might change with time. This can happen through survivors reaching out to other survivors and the public support groups, letting survivors know about the private support groups.

Adopting New School Safety Policies and Procedures Informed by School Shooting Survivors: Survivor-Informed Best Practices for School Safety

This book focused on the development of survivor-sensitive best practices for school safety. School shooting survivors who reenter the school setting face difficult trauma from the shooting and also from the policies and practices in place for school safety in many schools. The environment surrounding lockdown drills is unhealthy for all students and teachers, but especially for school shooting survivors. Many survivors are not valued for their knowledge and expertise on school safety and are often ignored or insulted when they bring up their concerns and ideas. The National Association of School Psychologists and the National Association of School Resource Officers jointly created and published recommendations for lockdown practices that schools should adopt. Survivors can add nuance to these recommendations as well.

This book also provides direction for fields of study in supporting school shooting survivors, school safety, and RPs. Participants are successful teachers who have found ways to maintain stability and wholeness in their lives despite their trauma, but they benefited from the intense and specific discussion in this study about their need for support as survivors. This is an important finding because, as there continue to be school shootings and the number of survivors increases, schools will need to know how to best support survivor teachers and offer a survivor-informed safe school. In the field of study surrounding school safety, including lockdowns and threat assessment teams, this study discovered the importance of including survivors in the discussion about school safety and incorporating their ideas into practice and policies. Despite evidence that current practices and policies are ineffective or harmful surrounding school safety, school districts and politicians continue utilizing them. The results of this study revealed that participants regularly ignore or speak out against policies and practices they believe are unsafe. The field of study for school safety would benefit from honoring their voices. While RPs were not a focus of the findings, participants prioritized and valued relationships with students. The field of study looking at how RJ and RPs can be used in schools would benefit from looking at the ways that they can be used to build relationships of trust that can help foster a positive school environment and relationships of trust that are necessary to prevent school shootings.

New school safety policies and procedures informed by school shooting survivors should be adopted by schools, such as the survivor-informed best practices for school safety created from this project (see Appendix E). Currently, many school shooting survivors who are teachers fear losing their jobs if their trauma affects them at work. Schools should be prepared to offer Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) benefits to teachers who experience a school shooting. Participants also talked about the care and support given to them after the shooting as very positive and offering them hope. School shooting survivors need to be aware of the support groups and resources available to them, which can be included in the survivor-informed best practices for school safety.

The current safety and school violence prevention policies are ineffective at best and harmful at worst (Borum et al., 2010; Perlstein, 2000; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Warnick & Kapa, 2019). They lead to a more negative school environment and disproportionate disciplinary actions. Anti-bullying programs, mental health services in schools, and threat assessment teams are effective ways to help prevent school violence, but they depend on relationships of trust among students and teachers. One way to do this is to listen to Columbine survivors share best practices regarding school safety. As a survivor of the Columbine shooting who is a teacher, the participants and I have a unique perspective on school safety. The survivor-sensitive best practices document I created has the potential to help school shooting survivors be less traumatized reentering a school setting and offers the support they need to function well at schools as students and teachers.

Discussing and Researching School Shootings in the Same Way as Other Assaults and Crimes of Violence: Stop Blaming the Victims (Teachers and Students) for School Shootings Regardless of Safety Procedures and Policies not Being Followed Correctly or Bullying Occurring at the School

School shootings need to be discussed and researched in the same way as other assaults and crimes of violence. The media and research on other forms of assault do not blame the victims for being assaulted or killed, yet this continues to happen to school shooting survivors and victims. This study recommends and demands that teachers stop being blamed for school shootings, regardless of safety procedures and policies not being followed correctly or bullying occurring at the school. More conversations around warning signs and red flags need to happen to better understand what constitutes risky behavior and what resources are available to help students experiencing mental health concerns. But the results of this study highlighted that even if teachers have concerns about a student, what are the resources and what can we really do if students have access to firearms? While participants acknowledged the need to provide a safe space, both physically and emotionally,

for their students, they emphasized the limitations of that relationship, both legally and philosophically. Teachers cannot and should not be responsible for preventing school shootings all on their own.

The media played a huge role in the Columbine shooting and still continues to dictate the narrative of that school shooting and other school shootings. This book in the mainstream media will give a voice to a specific set of survivors who have not had their stories told from a research perspective. The media controls the narrative of school shootings. Many survivors of the Columbine shooting have been interviewed by the media, but the story is dictated by the media personnel. This book is innovative in the field because it is written by a survivor who knows the participants. We share a phenomenological aspect of our lives and have a previous relationship. My book is a solutions-based product to address school violence because it gives a voice to teacher survivor educators. They are the experts in the field, and their voices need to be heard by as many people as possible to transform the narrative surrounding school shootings and school safety. It also includes photographs of the elicitation items that participants shared. The items represent how the survivors want to be seen and what they want people to know about them as opposed to the photographs that have been chosen by the media showing us in moments of trauma. The book and photographs allow the participants to take control of the narrative of being a Columbine survivor.

The amount and depth of data shared by participants were overwhelming and amazing. Participants shared openly with me about their experiences on the day of the shooting and the influence of that trauma on the rest of their lives since then. Columbine High School has become synonymous with the Columbine High School shooting and school shootings in general. The media and school safety decision-makers have co-opted the experience of Columbine survivors and created a narrative that is narrow and too often oversimplified. While the stories shared here demonstrate the resiliency of the participants and the wonderful work that they do as educators, the amount of trauma that they face on a daily basis in every aspect of their lives must be shared. The data also indicate that Columbine survivors who are teachers want to share what they have learned from their experience about school safety and building relationships of trust and care with their students. It will be important for the research to continue listening to the voices of school shooting survivors as this phenomenon continues to plague the United States.

Closing Thoughts

As I conclude this study from New Zealand, I could not have imagined the increase in the number and types of mass shootings in the United States since I began my project. As schools continue to adopt new safety features and make their buildings and procedures more prison-like, I find it difficult

to be hopeful about preventing school shootings. School shootings that have already occurred continue to cause trauma for those affected. As I prepared this book for final submission, the Columbine community experienced another loss. Anne Marie Hochhalter was shot and paralyzed on April 20, 1999, in the Columbine shooting. She spent her life working with other survivors of trauma and wanted to be viewed as someone who was not a victim. While I honor the work that she did and the way she wanted the world to see her, she was still undeniably a victim of school gun violence. She died on February 16, 2025, from what the Jefferson County Coroner's Office ruled a homicide. Anne Marie died of sepsis complicated by the gunshot wounds from the Columbine shooting. I was devastated at the loss of my friend I played flute with in high school. The conversation around gun control and gun freedom is so polarized and politicized that it is nearly impossible to make any changes to limits on guns, let alone make sweeping reforms necessary to begin addressing school shootings. I did not expect that my participants would have come to the same conclusion I had about the need for gun reform, so when this was a major finding of my study, I felt a renewed purpose in doing this work. Teachers are doing what they can to keep their classrooms safe, but they can only do so much.

While living in New Zealand, I have further reflected on my choice to be a teacher and my desire to continue in the profession. Being a first responder to an assault added to my experience of school as a traumatic place. I also experienced working in a building deemed unsafe according to earthquake safety stipulations. The Ministry of Education did not inform our school of the severity of the building's structural issues but decided it was safe enough without ever informing us of the problem. When our School Board found out the extent of the structural problems, they immediately shut down that part of the building and had us work from home on a rotation for six weeks until we could make safer arrangements for our students and staff. At one of our staff meetings, men from the Ministry of Education described the building in question as being unsafe on the top floors, while the floors underneath were like a "concrete bulletproof building." One staff member said this description of the building was comforting to them. I shared that I had taught in buildings that were literally designed to be bulletproof, and the thought of needing to have that kind of protection is not comforting for me. I let the Ministry of Education know that I expected to be safe in school, and for the people with power and money to make decisions that would keep me and my students safe. When people with power can make a school structurally safe or safe from firearms, I expect that they will.

The conversation around the roles and responsibilities of teachers and what is required of them affects me personally and continues to be a source of angst for me. I do not want to die because I am a teacher. That does not mean I do not care about my students or do not take my job seriously. It just

means that is not an expectation that should be put on teachers. If we are asking our teachers to be willing to die for their students or to arm themselves and kill for their students, then our policies and procedures are wrong. Stop blaming the victims. Stop using fear and the Columbine shooting footage to make teachers take school safety seriously. We already take it seriously, as do our students who have grown up in the Columbine Generation. It is time for politicians and those with power to make changes so that teachers and students can be safe and not just feel safe at school.

Notes

1 More information can be found at https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/, https://www.therebelsproject.org/, https://www.traumasurvivorsnetwork.org/, https://www.traumasurvivorsnetwork.org/, https://survivorsempowered.org/.
2 More information can be found at https://rachelschallenge.org/ and https://chooselovemovement.org/.

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Appendix A

High School Newspaper Editorial Column

Page 10~May 25, 1999 Student Sentiments The Courier

Faith in God brings healing and peace during tragedies and everyday times

This editorial is definitely the hardest thing I have written in my entire life. I want to sound profound and comforting, but I know that that is not possible. Everything I say will sound trite and hollow, but I want to leave you with some things that I have learned as I move into a new phase of my life.

Recently some of my AP English class went to a breakfast with a poet named Dr. Bin Ramke. His words struck a chord in my heart. He told us that it is a scary thing to know someone for a long time. As time passes in a marriage relationship a person believes that he or she knows the other person. He said that people stop listening to each other because they think they know what the others will say. Ramke commented that the person is remembering past things about that person instead of seeing him or her in the present. He added that when a person reads a piece of literature and then reads a different one, if that person rereads the first piece it is forever different. After coming close to losing people I love dearly I realize that this statement is so true. I have neglected to tell people how special they are to me, and it is sad that it took a horrible event for me to ponder how special they are.

I have enjoyed my four years of classes, band, sports and memories with so many great people, but Columbine will always be different in my heart and mind. When CHS hosted the Trick-or-Treat-Street my fellow newspaper members and I helped decorate the publications door. I remember having a warm, wonderful feeling as I watched so many students working together to make life more enjoyable for some children. Memories of sporting events flash through my mind as CHS students united together to cheer on our teams. Marching band was one of my favorite activities during high school, and I loved working with more than 100 people for a common goal. Now, I have memories of people crying together at memorials and funerals, going to Cooper 7, meeting famous athletes and loving on each other as an extended family.

Although April 20th was a terrible day for our school, we have found good in the experience. While I was stuck in a freshman biology class wanting to be rescued, I had a great thought. I looked around at so many faces I did not know and was amazed at the love I felt radiating from them. We did not care what people looked like, what activities they were involved with or if we even got along. At that moment we realized that only life matters. After we were rescued I hugged so many people and did not want to let them go. I realized how close I came to losing loved ones and to losing my own life.

When we gathered in groups those first few days after that Tuesday, it was so hard for me to drag myself away from people. I could not help thinking that it could be the last time I would ever see those people. While I have always been aware of this fact, surviving this event has awakened my emotions. Even though I will be leaving for most of the summer and will then be going to college out of state, I will always have a bond with everyone who survived and will have a special place for them in my heart. One of the most important lessons I am taking with me from this tragedy is to tell people that I care for them and give them a hug.

My peace is my faith in Jesus. He never said that life would be easy, but He promises me and everyone that He will not give us more pain than we can deal with. Right now, I cannot imagine much more pain than what we are suffering, and I just keep looking to God for comfort and to bring me out of this.

Co-Editor in Chief

On April 20th I was typing my editorial for the annual senior issue of the *Courier*. Now, my topic seems very ironic, but it is still true. I wrote about the freedom we experience as Americans and the safety we have. I said that I have never been afraid because of my Christianity, and that Christians in our country are blessed.

Cassie Bernall is a person I hope that I can be like. I pray that I would stand up for my faith the way that she bravely did. To this day I still boldly say that I am a Christian, and I hope that in the future I will continue to proudly share my faith. During the tragedy people have prayed and called out to God, and I pray that we remember God as the healing takes place. While things will never be completely as they once were, we will eventually have peace in our lives. My heart's desire is that people will still lean on God and depend on Him during these times of their lives.

— Michelle Markert
Class of 1999

Aftermath

Appendix A.1 Author's final editorial in the high school newspaper that was published after the Columbine shooting.

Index

Pages in *italics* refer to figures and pages in **bold** refer to tables.