

WARNING BEHAVIORS

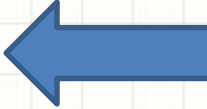
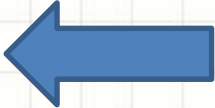
Association of Threat Assessment
Professionals, Great Plains Chapter

Warning Behaviors

- Pathway warning behaviors
- Fixation
- Identification—warrior or pseudo-commando
- Novel aggression
- Energy burst
- Leakage
- Last resort
- Directly communicated threats

*Meloy, Hoffman, Guidimann, & James, 2012

Pathway to Violence

- Grievance
- Ideation
- Research and Planning 
- Preparation 
- Breach
- Attack

Pathway warning behaviors

Research and planning activities: Surveillance, approach behavior, probing (looking for a response or reaction), using internet search engines to obtain personal information, researching methods to attack (weapons, bombs, etc.)

Research is any attempt to gain information about the target or location.

Innocuous behavior may in fact be high risk pathway warning behavior

- An employee fired a year ago is seen sitting in a car across the street.
- An estranged husband shows up at his wife's place of work and has never done so in the past.
- A woman finds a dead rose on her chair at work
- All are examples of possible, if not likely, pathway warning behaviors

Intimacy effect and research

- The more intimate the relationship between offender and target, the less research is needed to plan an attack.
- Unless, of course, the target has changed major aspects of their lives and is no longer living, working, or frequenting the same locations that the offenders knows about.

Planning

- Planning is a mental process that occurs during research.
- Options are weighed or tested, rejected, or modified.
- A person making plans (not just fantasizing) has decided to act and is now deciding what actions to take.

Planning

- Plans can be simple or elaborate. General or detailed.
- Planning might reflect the grievance or it may be more about expressing anger over the perceived injustice.
- Plans are the who, what, when, where, and how of targeted violence. Grievances answer the question why.

Preparations

- Weapons acquisition
- Obtaining other equipment
- Transportation
- Observing significant dates
- Final act behaviors
- costuming

Preparations are activities

- And are therefore observable.
- Third party monitoring can be hugely beneficial
- If you think you are in a preparation phase, you might consider surveillance and/or an interview with the suspect. Remember, the goal is to prevent violence, not necessarily build a criminal case.

Isla Vista Killings

- Shooter visited a gun range in Sept. 2012
- November—purchased a Glock 34 pistol
- Spring 2013—purchased 2 Sig Sauer P226 pistols, thought they were superior to the Glock
- Attacks occurred May 23, 2014

Fixation

- Increasingly pathological preoccupation with a person or cause.
- “It’s all he ever talks about or thinks about.”
- The rest of his life is falling apart or is being damaged by the obsession.
- Devoting a lot of time and energy to the object of the obsession.

Case Study--Fixation

March 1999-March 2000
Worked as a reporter in Florida, complained he was harassed for being gay, eventually let go for “odd behavior.” Described as a diva. Filed a lawsuit alleging racial discrimination. Worked at several other TV stations before being hired by WDBJ in April, 2012. Work conflicts arose almost immediately.



Background

- Directed to seek counseling after coworkers reported feeling threatened, uncomfortable around him.
- Dismissed in Feb, 2013
- Escorted by police from building, created a big disturbance.
- Filed EEOC complaint.
- Killed both of his cats after being fired.
Described one of them as “not going quickly.”

Facebook and Twitter

- Used both to promote his beliefs of racial discrimination, named both of his eventual victims. Claimed one victim made a “coded racist remark” and the other had filed a complaint with human resources.

The injustice collector

- Mary Ellen O'Toole called him an injustice collector. This ongoing process of blaming others for their failed lives produces a hatred that becomes a fixation. Hatred can become very generalized, not “target specific.”
- Hatred is lasting, as opposed to anger or rage which passes in time.
- Never see fault in themselves, have no coping mechanisms.
- Egocentric, narcissistic

On air shootings

- August 26, 2015
- 3 years after being let go
- After the shooting, uploaded video of the shooting to Twitter and Facebook. Sent a 23 page fax to the station titled “Suicide Note for Friend and Family”, a rambling account of his multiple grievances.
- Expressed admiration for Columbine and Virginia Tech shooter, identified with 9-11 terrorist attack

South Carolina Church shooting

- Described this as “a tipping point...but my anger has been building steadily...I’ve been a human powder keg for awhile...just waiting to go BOOM!!”

Identification



The warrior or pseudo commando

- May include identification with past mass killers.
- Costuming is a manifestation of this mindset.

Identification



Columbine shooters

- Both wore t-shirts on which they had written
Wrath

Natural Selection

Novel Aggression

- An act of violence that appears unrelated to the target. This may be a “test of ability” to act violently.
- Killing of pets (here kitty, kitty)

Energy Burst

- Increase of frequency or variety of warning behaviors
- Accelerated rate of training or practicing with weapons, large ammunition purchase, stalking is intensified, etc.

Columbine

- Pushed the attack date back one day while waiting for more ammunition.

Leakage

- Communication of intent to commit violence to a third party
- Leakage can occur through social media, school work or projects, casual conversations
- May not be direct—the violence might be inferred. Might take the form of a warning to avoid the attack.

Columbine leakage

- School project video “Hitmen for Hire” in which they killed students in the school
- Violence themes in creative writing projects
- Personal journals (Waco, Oklahoma City)
- Website containing explicit threats against the school and specific students

Leakage today gets our attention

- Very few reports that constitute leakage are dismissed out of hand.
- The question still remains, is it a warning sign of future behavior or was there no serious intent behind it?
- The answer is in the context of all of the known information and our efforts to learn more (active investigation.)

Last Resort

- The feeling that options have run out, their back is against the wall, and they have no choice but to resort to violence.
- May include a time imperative (e.g. I have to do this before I get sentenced to prison)
- Deadlines associated with legal proceedings like divorce or custody decrees

Killings in Isla Vista, May 23, 2014

- Day of retribution video
- Listen for themes: no choice but to resort to violence, others forced this to happen, injustice of his situation, grandiosity, rejection (actual or projected?), seeker of fame and recognition, nihilism
- Lack of specificity of the target (everyone who has normal relationships and is happy)
- Grievance collector

Directly communicated threats

- Might include warning others to avoid the time and location of the planned attack
- Not all attacks are preceded by direct threats
- Intimacy effect