

Role Models, Contagions, and Copycats: An Exploration of the Influence of Prior Killers on Subsequent Attacks

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INTRODUCTION

There is a great deal of interest in the idea that mass shootings have a contagion effect or can result in copycat attacks, i.e., that one attack leads to more attacks. Certainly, many school shooters have not only been aware of previous shooters, but have studied their attacks and their writings, and on occasion apparently sought to follow in their footsteps.

In my book *School Shooters: Understanding High School, College, and Adult Perpetrators*, I discussed three types of external influence: peer influence, media violence, and role models / ideology. Though role models can be found among real people as well as fictional characters (whether in books, movies, videogames, etc.), the focus in this document is on influence by actual people.

This document includes an exploration of role models for violence, but also considers other factors that might contribute to the contagion or copycat effect. The second section provides speculation and documentation regarding instances in which one perpetrator may have found inspiration from previous perpetrators.

Finally, it must be kept in mind that influence is not causation. Knowing about a school shooter doesn't cause someone to become a school shooter. For people already at risk or on a path toward violence, however, external influences in the form of other mass attacks may be a factor in spurring them on toward committing their own attack.

TERMINOLOGY

The terms contagion, copycat, and role models may not refer to clearly distinguishable dynamics. Some preliminary definitions, however, are provided here.

A “general contagion” effect may occur for some perpetrators, meaning that someone perceives that mass attacks are becoming more common and this perception (whether accurate or not) makes it easier for him to proceed with his own attack. This is discussed below in “Breaking the Taboo” and “Normalizing, or Finding a Peer Group.”

In contrast to this general contagion effect, there may be more “specific contagion” effects related to the influence of one or more particular perpetrators. This is what is referred to as role-modeling. The term copycat could possibly refer to copying a specific perpetrator or perhaps also include copying attackers in general.

BREAKING THE TABOO

One way of understanding the concept of contagion is the possibility that the more the taboo against mass murder is broken, the easier it becomes for the next perpetrator. Each time that threshold is crossed may lower the threshold for people already on the path toward violence. Thus, the phenomenon may be feeding on itself, growing with each new incident.

NORMALIZING, OR FINDING A PEER GROUP

Another aspect of the concept of contagion may be that it serves to normalize mass violence and those who commit it. If the potential perpetrator feels alone, outcast, perhaps even despised, studying shooters or joining an online forum or chat-group about mass murderers gives them a virtual peer group. It is their way of joining a subculture in which they are not only normal, but perhaps feel themselves to be special, apart from and above mainstream society. Multiple shooters have criticized mainstream culture or society, as if they had greater insight than the masses of people. This includes Eric Harris, Sebastian Bosse, Pekka-Eric Auvinen, and Adam Lanza.

Adam Lanza, for example, appears to have found two ways of creating virtual peer groups. He compiled a remarkably detailed spreadsheet of information on five hundred mass murderers. Being immersed in this research may have made his own interest in homicide seem less aberrant. Similarly, Lanza, who did not have a group of friends to hang out with, found an online forum that originally was focused on the videogame *Super Columbine Massacre* but broadened into a discussion of mass murderers and movies about them. This was a place where Lanza could communicate with people who shared his interests. In one post, he wrote, “Serial killers are lame. Everyone knows that mass murderers are the cool kids.”¹ This comment did not elicit any alarm or condemnation on the forum. Apparently, in that context, such a comment was not strange or out of place. Thus, both Lanza’s research and the online forum may have served to make mass murder not only normal, but “cool.”

ROLE MODELS THAT LEGITIMATE VIOLENCE

Many shooters have found role models in the months or years leading up to their attacks. Many school shooters were interested in Hitler and the Nazis, while in the years since Columbine, many subsequent shooters have taken Eric Harris as a role model. Having a role model or an ideology that supports their violent intentions may serve the purpose of transforming what is otherwise aberrant and abhorrent into something admirable. It validates, or legitimates, the urge toward violence.

There may not be a meaningful difference between finding a peer group that normalizes one’s violent intentions and finding a role model to admire that inspires imitation. The possible difference is that one involves more of a friendship among equals, whereas the other consists of someone of lesser stature looking up to a more exalted figure. The end result, however, appears to be the same.

SEEKING FAME

In some cases, the concept of contagion appears to be intimately tied up with the idea of fame. This was perhaps best expressed

by Chris Harper-Mercer, the Umpqua Community College shooter, who wrote a blog about Vester Flanagan’s murder of the television newscaster:

On an interesting note, I have noticed that so many people like him are all alone and unknown, yet when they spill a little blood, the whole world knows who they are. A man who was known by no one, is now known by everyone. His face splashed across every screen, his name across the lips of every person on the planet, all in the course of one day. Seems the more people you kill, the more you’re in the limelight.²

For those who feel like they are nobody, the path to becoming somebody is very simple – get a gun and shoot a lot of people.

Thus, in addition to breaking the taboo against killing, mass shootings also generate incredible media attention. Perhaps some perpetrators are not as preoccupied with killing as with fame, with murder serving as the vehicle of their own elevation to what seems to them like celebrity status.

LIST OF PERPETRATORS

The following list includes documented evidence as well as speculation regarding the impact of prior killers on subsequent killers. Though the primary focus is on school shooters, non-school shooters who may have influenced (or been influenced by) school shooters are also cited. There have also been many potential or foiled attacks in which people cited Columbine or other attacks as influences; these are not included here. Only incidents in which people were shot are listed.

Though the idea of contagion is concerned with contemporary figures who may have inspired subsequent attackers, historical figures are also noted as possible influences. Though these may not have contributed to a current contagion, it is interesting that perpetrators find role models from previous decades, centuries, and even millennia.

The perpetrators are listed alphabetically, but their “followers” (i.e., those subsequent shooters who referred back to them) are listed chronologically.

Finally, rather than using phrases such as “clearly was a role model,” “appears to have been a role model,” or “might have been a role model,” for the sake of simplicity people are simply listed as role models, with the reason for including them as such presented and referenced. This should not be taken as a definitive determination of a contagion effect.

Following the list of perpetrators and their role models, a diagram illustrates the apparent lines of influence from Columbine through subsequent attacks.

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AUVINEN'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

Though Auvinen lived in Finland, his manifesto reveals clear influence by Eric Harris. Not every similarity will be cited here, but several will be pointed out. For example, Harris wrote multiple times about “natural selection” (see “Themes in the Writings of Eric Harris” at www.schoolshooters.info). Auvinen also wrote about natural selection and titled his statement, “Natural Selector’s Manifesto.” Harris wrote scathing comments about “retards,” and Auvinen also complained about retards. Harris wrote about himself as being above humanity and god-like, and Auvinen did, too. Both also wrote about “existentialism.”

More specifically, Harris wrote, “HATE! I’m full of hate and I love it.”³ Auvinen wrote, “Hate, I’m so full of it and I love it.”⁴ When Auvinen wrote, “Like some other wise people have said in the past, human race is not worth fighting for or saving,”⁵ the wise man he was referring to was Eric Harris, who wrote, “The human race isn’t worth fighting for anymore . . . people just aren’t worth saving.”⁶

On 20 April 2007, Auvinen “made his first comment in the ‘Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold’ group in the IRC-Galleria social network. It was the anniversary of the Columbine shooting.”⁷

Seung Hui Cho

On the day of Cho’s attack, Auvinen wrote: “Hahhahhaa! A historic day. Cho Seung-Hui has just killed 33 people in a university in Virginia. The new record in so-called educational institution shootings.”⁸

October Revolution

Auvinen’s manifesto framed his shooting as a political revolution; he apparently picked the date of 7 November for the attack because it was the anniversary of the October Revolution, also known as the Bolshevik Revolution that occurred in Russia in 1917.⁹

AUVINEN AS ROLE MODEL: *see Matti Saari.*

AMY BISHOP

12 February 2010

BISHOP'S ROLE MODELS:

Killer in the news

In 1986, long before Amy Bishop committed her mass attack at the University of Alabama she shot and killed her brother with a shotgun, fled the scene, and tried to hijack a car from a car dealership. She claimed the shooting was an accident and it was accepted as such at the time. Interestingly, however, an article was found in her room about a man who committed murder with a shotgun, fled the scene,

and hijacked a car from a car dealership. This suggests that Bishop’s actions were copied from the news story.¹⁰

ROBERT C. BONELLI, JR.

13 February 2005

BONELLI'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

Though Bonelli was not a school shooter, he apparently was obsessed with Columbine and had a large collection of Columbine memorabilia in his home.¹¹

SEBASTIAN BOSSE

20 November 2006

BOSSE'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold, other school shooters

In one of his journals, Bosse wrote:

ERIC HARRIS IS GOD! There is no doubt.

It is scary how similar Eric was to me. Sometimes it seems as if I were to live his life again, as if everything would repeat itself. I am not a copy of REB, VoDKa, Steinhäuser, Gill, Kinkel, Weise or anybody else! I am the advancement of REB! I learned from his mistakes, the bombs. I learned from his entire life.¹²

Reb and VoDKa were the nicknames of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. The other references are to Robert Steinhäuser, Kimveer Gill, Kip Kinkel, and Jeffrey Weise, all of whom were school shooters. Later in the journal, he referred to Harris, Klebold and himself as heroes.

MICHAEL CARNEAL

1 December 1997

CARNEAL AS ROLE MODEL: *see Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold.*

ALVARO CASTILLO

30 August 2006

CASTILLO'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

The first page of Castillo’s journal has a photograph of Harris as well as the dates of Harris’s birth and death.¹³ Castillo attempted to kill himself on the seventh anniversary of the attack at Columbine, but his father intervened. Harris named one of his guns Arlene, and as Castillo noted in his journal, he did the same. He noted his desire to buy clothes to match those that Harris wore when he attacked Columbine High School: “I will buy black cargo pants and black boots online to complete the uniform that Eric was wearing on April 20, 1999.”¹⁴ His journal refers to an autobiography he had written that was saved on his computer with the title

“Columbine.” His journal also refers to the day of his attack as “Operation Columbine.”

The court case in the North Carolina Court of Appeals (State of North Carolina v. Alvaro Rafael Castillo, No. COA10-814¹⁵) contains a wealth of information regarding Castillo’s fascination with Eric Harris and the attack at Columbine. The following passages are direct quotations from the court report:

On March 10, Alvaro wrote that he was obsessed with the Columbine massacre. He mentioned videos he had seen about school shootings. He wrote that he felt sorry for the Columbine shooters — Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold — as well as for their victims. He expressed a physical attachment to Eric Harris, and he worried about his sexuality.¹⁶

He also put in his journal photographs of the guns used by Harris and Klebold and a photograph of their bodies after they had killed themselves ... On March 29, Alvaro wrote that he would kill himself with a shotgun because Eric Harris killed himself with a shotgun ... On April 5, Alvaro wrote that he had chosen April 20 (the seventh anniversary of the Columbine shootings) for his suicide and that he would kill himself at the exact time of day that Eric Harris had killed himself.¹⁷

[Castillo wrote:] “Anyway, I now realize what I must do. I must commit a Columbine-like massacre at ... Orange High School.”¹⁸

In June, Alvaro told his mother that he wanted to visit Columbine High School in Colorado, and she agreed to go with him. She somehow thought that visiting Columbine might end his obsession with that massacre. They went for two days to Colorado. Alvaro was excited to visit Columbine. He bought a trench coat in Colorado because Eric Harris had worn a trench coat during the Columbine massacre ... On July 10, he wrote that on the day of the massacre, “I will contact the principal of Columbine High School and tell him about my plans” ... He began to make pipe bombs because Harris and Klebold used pipe bombs at Columbine; he learned how to make them from a movie about the Columbine massacre. On July 24 (his last day of therapy), he wrote, “I know that I am doing the right thing. We must remember Columbine. Sacrifices must be made.”¹⁹

He said he would buy black cargo pants and boots for his shooting. He wrote, “I must do this! I have to show the world Columbine.” ... On August 29, he wrote, “Well, tomorrow is the day that Hillsborough, NC will remember Columbine once and for all” ... Alvaro also talked about the significance he found in similarities between the signs for Columbine and Orange High

Schools: “I’ve been looking for signs of Columbine in Orange High School. And look. Look at this. That sign, my friends, looks exactly like the one in Columbine ... It looks exactly like it. This is why it must happen.”²⁰

[Castillo wrote:] “Today is the big day for Operation Columbine. It is time that the world be reminded of Columbine. I will die today!” ... He had written “Shoot me” and “Columbine” in marker on the headband. He had written “Natural Selection” on the front of the T-shirt [note: Harris had done this, too] and “Remember Columbine, April 20, 1999, Littleton, Colorado” on the back ... According to [Officer] Ivey, Alvaro said “nonsensical things, talking about Columbine.” Alvaro said twice, “Kill me. Just kill me. Remember Columbine.” Sheriff’s deputies arrived at the school. As Ivey put him into a patrol car, Alvaro said, “Remember Columbine.”²¹

Further light is shed on the reference to Castillo expressing a physical attachment to Eric Harris by a passage in his journal: “Eric is just so good-looking. I can’t believe he couldn’t get a date from the prom. If I was a girl, I would have gone to the prom with him. Does that sound gay, straight or bi[sexual]?”²²

Kip Kinkel

Castillo deliberately committed his attack on Kip Kinkel’s birthday. The evidence for this is found in the court case:

On August 10, Alvaro wrote that he had chosen August 30 as the date for his planned Orange High School massacre. He noted that it was the anniversary of the flooding of New Orleans from Hurricane Katrina and the birthday of Kip Kinkel, who killed his parents and then killed two students in a school shooting in 1998.²³

Charles Whitman

In 2006, Alvaro Castillo mentioned in his journal having watched a documentary about Whitman, noting that the 40th anniversary of Whitman’s attack was approaching.²⁴

John Hinckley

He was also interested in John Hinckley, who shot President Reagan in 1981. He compared his obsession with a girl (A.R.) he knew to Hinckley’s obsession with Jodie Foster: “He observed that he was obsessed with A.R., just as John Hinckley, Jr. was obsessed with actress Jodie Foster when he shot President Reagan.”²⁵ Castillo also listed Hinckley as someone he would like to meet.²⁶

Other role models

Castillo “compiled an 18-page notebook with detailed descriptions and photographs of school shootings, other mass murders, and shooters, which he named, ‘Mass Murderers and School Shootings of the 20th and 21st Centuries.’”²⁷

CHO'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

Cho's interest in Columbine long pre-dated his attack. The official report on the Virginia Tech shooting states, "During the 8th grade, suicidal and homicidal ideations are identified by Cho's middle school teachers in his writing. It is connected to the Columbine shootings this year. (He references Columbine in school writings.)"²⁸ The report also notes that shortly after the attack at Columbine: "Cho wrote a disturbing paper in English class that drew quick reaction from his teacher. Cho's written words expressed generalized thoughts of suicide and homicide, indicating that 'he wanted to repeat Columbine,' according to someone familiar with the situation."²⁹ In Cho's manifesto, he identified with the Columbine killers in the phrase, "we martyrs, like Eric and Dylan."³⁰

Hitler and Manson

Cho also used the number "88" in his manifesto, citing it as the number of the Anti-Terrorist. The number 88 is sometimes used to mean "Heil Hitler" because "h" is the 8th letter of the alphabet. Whether this was Cho's reason for using it is unknown.

Cho also used the name Ax Manson in his fiction; whether or not this was a reference to Charles Manson is also unknown.

CHO AS ROLE MODEL: *see Matthew Murray, Steven Kazmierczak, Pekka-Eric Auvinen, Matti Saari, Wellington de Oliveira, Adam Lanza, Aaron Ybarra, and Chris Harper-Mercer.*

BRUCO EASTWOOD

23 February 2010

EASTWOOD'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

Eastwood reportedly wrote in a journal:

Where I come from they, or I should say, respect life 100%, but what do I do when I'm the only one who understands that way. Are they going to listen, probably not. Like Columbine H. S. Do they ever think that some of us just ain't playing?³⁴

CHAD ESCOBEDO

10 April 2007

ESCOBEDO'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris/Dylan Klebold

Escobedo reported to law enforcement officials that he had watched a documentary on Columbine and shortly after this had the idea to commit his own attack.³⁵

DANN AS ROLE MODEL: *see James Wilson.*

WELLINGTON DE OLIVEIRA

7 April 2011

DE OLIVEIRA'S ROLE MODELS:

Seung Hui Cho

Wellington de Oliveira referred to Cho as "a brother": "Like Cho, he says he was once weak and now is strong and will seek revenge for himself and others who like him were persecuted."³¹ Also, "Among the seven photos of Oliveira recovered from his computer and released, two show him in poses similar to those seen in photos of Cho;"³² whether this was imitation or coincidence is unknown.

Edmar Freitas and Muslim terrorists

De Oliveira identified with a previous Brazilian school shooter, Edmar Freitas. In addition he was fascinated by Muslim terrorists and told people he was Osama bin Laden.³³ In fact, his obsession with terrorists appears to have been the major influence on his pursuing a path of violence.

EDMAR FREITAS

27 January 2003

FREITAS AS ROLE MODEL: *see Wellington de Oliveira.*

KIMVEER GILL

13 September 2006

GILL'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

Gill's online postings reveal his interest in Harris and Klebold. In a list of "Likes" he includes "Reb and V (Modern Day Saints)."³⁶ Reb was Harris's nickname and V was short for Vodka, which was Klebold's nickname. Gill also appears to imitate Eric Harris. For example, Harris wrote "Ich bin gott" (German for "I am God") and Gill also wrote "Ich bin gott."³⁷ (See "Themes in the Writings of Eric Harris" at www.schoolshooters.info regarding his writing of this phrase.) There are other possible connections to Columbine but they may be coincidental. For example, Gill wrote that "Black leather Trenchcoats rule."³⁸ Whether this was related to his interest in Harris and Klebold is unknown. Another possible connection is that Harris wrote about his desire to "KILL MANKIND" and "Destroy as much as possible,"³⁹ and Gill wrote, "Destroy all mankind."⁴⁰ Similarly, Harris wrote about himself as god-like (see "Themes in the Writings of Eric Harris" and Gill wrote, "I am God."⁴¹ Harris wrote about the government "lying to everyone all the time"⁴² and Gill wrote that the "governments of the world keep lying [sic] to the people of the world."⁴³

Gill may have also imitated Harris in his fascination with the Nazis, or perhaps this was something Gill came to on his own. His online posts include praise of Aryans,⁴⁴ the phrase “Germany rulz” (i.e., “rules”),⁴⁵ and multiple repetitions of “Heil Heil Heil.”⁴⁶

ROBERT GLADDEN

27 August 2012

GLADDEN’S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

Gladden reportedly listed Harris and Klebold on his Facebook page as inspirations.⁴⁷

**ANDREW GOLDEN
MITCHELL JOHNSON**

24 March 1998

GOLDEN AND JOHNSON’S ROLE MODEL:

Joseph Todd

On 24 March 1998, Golden and Johnson committed their attack in Jonesboro, Arkansas. They did not enter the school, but carried out a sniper attack from the woods overlooking the school. In my book, *Why Kids Kill: Inside the Minds of School Shooters*, I speculate that Golden got the idea for the attack from Joseph Todd, who committed a sniper attack from the woods by his school in Stamps, Arkansas on 15 December 1997.

During his deposition (after his release), Johnson said that Golden first approached him with the idea of the attack around Christmas, 1997.⁴⁸ This would have been shortly after Todd’s attack. As I noted in *Why Kids Kill*:

Although there is no proof that Drew [Golden] knew of the shooting, there are several reasons to think this event may have influenced the boy’s plan. It occurred in the same state and would have been covered in television news and in newspapers. Drew first mentioned his idea for the attack to Mitchell shortly after Todd’s shooting. And all three boys carried out their shootings from hidden, protected areas. Joseph Todd did not enter the school and shoot people; he hid in a wooded area near the school and gunned people down from a distance. This is precisely what Drew and Mitchell did.⁴⁹

GOLDEN AND JOHNSON AS ROLE MODELS: *see Andrew Wurst, Kip Kinkel, and Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold.*

ERIC HAINSTOCK

29 September 2006

HAINSTOCK’S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

Hainstock reportedly “invoked Columbine” in the days lead-

ing up to his attack.⁵⁰

CHRIS HARPER-MERCER

1 October 2015

HARPER-MERCER’S ROLE MODELS:

Various killers

Based on the videos he uploaded, Harper-Mercer appears to have been interested in Adam Lanza. The final video he uploaded, just three days before his attack, “was a BBC documentary called *Surviving Sandy Hook* about the school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, in 2012.”⁵¹ According to another source, he also uploaded “an interview with Charles Manson and documentaries about the 1999 Columbine massacre and the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting.”⁵² He may also have had an interest in the Nazis. One source stated, “His username on the dating site Spiritual Passions was ironcross45, an apparent reference to the Nazi military honour.”⁵³ Another source noted that he had the movie *UFO Secrets of the Third Reich*.⁵⁴ Finally, as noted in the introduction, Harper-Mercer apparently imitated Vester Flanagan in an attempt to achieve notoriety.

ERIC HARRIS / DYLAN KLEBOLD

20 April 1999

HARRIS AND KLEBOLD’S ROLE MODELS:

Hitler and Manson

During their senior year at Columbine High School, Eric Harris wrote a paper on Hitler and the Nazis,⁵⁵ and Dylan Klebold wrote one on Charles Manson and his “family.”⁵⁶ In his journal, Harris commented on the assignment he was writing: “by the way, this Nazi report is boosting my love of killing even more.”⁵⁷ He also wrote:

I fucking can’t get enough of the swastika, the SS, and the iron cross. Hitler and his head boys fucked up a few times and it cost them the war, but I love their beliefs and who they were, what they did, and what they wanted.⁵⁸

In *Why Kids Kill: Inside the Minds of School Shooters*, I wrote about the apparent influence of these figures on Harris and Klebold. See also my article, “Influences on the Ideology of Eric Harris” at www.schoolshooters.info. For additional information regarding Harris’s interest in Hitler and the Nazis, see “jcs0 Columbine Documents Organized by Theme” at www.schoolshooters.info.

Michael Carneal

Regarding possible influences from previous school shooters, Eric Harris wrote a paper called “Guns in School” (dated 10 December 1997).⁵⁹ He referenced the recent shooting by Michael Carneal (1 December 1997), though he erroneously said it occurred in Texas. There is no indication that Harris was thinking of committing an attack at the time he wrote

this paper, but his choice of topic shows his awareness of other shooters and an interest in the phenomenon.

Andrew Golden / Mitchell Johnson

Harris also apparently referred to Golden and Johnson but thought they were in Kentucky: “Do not think we’re trying to copy anyone. We had the idea before the first one ever happened. Our plan is better, not like those fucks in Kentucky with camouflage and .22s.”⁶⁰ Though he denied being influenced by them, this needs to be taken with a grain of salt. Harris wrote repeatedly about the issue of influence and how much he wanted to never be influenced by anyone, but recognized that this was impossible (see “Themes in the Writings of Eric Harris” at www.schoolshooters.info).

HARRIS AND KLEBOLD AS ROLE MODELS: *see Todd Cameron Smith, T.J. Solomon, Seth Trickey, Andy Williams, Jason Hoffman, Robert Steinhäuser, Robert Bonelli, James Newman, Jeffrey Weise, Alvaro Castillo, Kimveer Gill, Eric Hainstock, Sebastian Bosse, Chad Escobedo, Seung Hui Cho, Pekka-Eric Auvinen, Matthew Murray, Steven Kazmierczak, Matti Saari, Tim Kretschmer, Bruco Eastwood, Robert Gladden, Adam Lanza, Jose Reyes, Karl Pierson, Alex Hribal, Geddy Kramer, Aaron Ybarra, and Chris Harper-Mercer.*

JASON HOFFMAN

22 March 2001

HOFFMAN’S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

According to a reporter, Hoffman “made a reference to the Columbine High massacre in class earlier this year and simulated guns with his hands, a classmate said.”⁶¹

ALEX HRIBAL

9 April 2014

HRIBAL’S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

Though Hribal committed a mass stabbing at his school rather than a shooting, he was clearly influenced by the attack at Columbine. Hribal’s final letter stated, “I would be nothing and this whole event would never occur if it weren’t for Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold of Columbine High School.”⁶² A few sentences later he wrote, “I became a prophet because I spread the word of a God, Eric Harris.”⁶³

Caesar and Lenin

Hribal also wrote that Julius Caesar and Vladimir Lenin became gods.⁶⁴

STEVEN KAZMIERCZAK

14 February 2008

KAZMIERCZAK’S ROLE MODELS:

School shooters, mass murderers, serial killers, terrorists

According to the official report on his attack:

Throughout his lifetime, Steven Kazmierczak was never able to shake his obsessional interest in violence, destruction, murder, and the macabre. Wherever he happened to find it, whether in video games, films, books about serial killers, Hitler, reports of new horrors on the nightly news, Columbine, Jeffery Dahmer or Virginia Tech, it all fascinated him and he could never seem to get enough.⁶⁵

The report also noted, “The NIU assailant spoke persistently and admiringly of Adolph [sic] Hitler, Jeffrey Dahmer, Ted Bundy, and other mass murderers. He examined the methods of the Columbine and Virginia Tech killers.”⁶⁶

Kazmierczak’s interest in violence showed up in his academic writings, which included “*Hamas: The History and Ideology of the Islamic Resistance Movement*” and “*No Crazies with Guns!: A Brief Summary of the Aftermath of Virginia Tech and the Ensuing Debate Over Mental Health and Gun Control Legislation.*”⁶⁷

Kazmierczak openly discussed his fascination with school shootings with his friends: “Steve admired how Cho thought to chain the doors, how Dylan and Eric planned to create confusion with the propane-tank bombs.”⁶⁸ He talked about “the methodology of Columbine, going through weapons choices, the plan, each step, what they could have done differently.”⁶⁹ When Cho committed his attack,

“Steve’s excited. He’s firing off emails. ‘Crazy,’ he tells Jessica [his on and off girlfriend], and sends her Cho’s writings. He’s all over this with Kevin [a friend], studying everything. The writings, where Cho bought his guns, his mental-health history, the photos, the planning, the timing, even his favorite songs.”⁷⁰

In addition to school shooters and serial killers, Kazmierczak reportedly was interested in domestic terrorism, such as the Oklahoma City bombing, as well as the incident in Waco, Texas.⁷¹

KAZMIERCZAK AS ROLE MODEL: *see Adam Lanza.*

KIP KINKEL

21 May 1998

KINKEL’S ROLE MODELS:

Andrew Golden / Mitchell Johnson

Kinkel was reported to have been interested in the Jonesboro attack. According to Frontline, Kip and a friend “watched

some of the school shootings coverage on TV monitors at school and both said, ‘Hey, that’s pretty cool.’”⁷² Two months after Jonesboro, Kinkel carried out his attack.

KINKEL AS ROLE MODEL: *see Alvaro Castillo, Adam Lanza, and Jose Reyes.*

GEDDY KRAMER

29 April 2014

KRAMER’S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

Kramer was not a school shooter, but he viewed them as role models. He wrote, “I’ve found that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold are some of my heroes . . . So I’m going to go out guns blazing.”⁷³

TIM KRETSCHMER

11 March 2009

KRETSCHMER’S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris/Dylan Klebold

Kretschmer reportedly researched Columbine.⁷⁴

Robert Steinhäuser

Kretschmer, like Steinhäuser, was a German school shooter. Kretschmer wrote an essay for school about Steinhäuser’s shooting; whether he was given this topic to write on or chose it himself is unknown.⁷⁵

Kretschmer also participated in an online forum devoted to school shootings where he reportedly commented, “the funny thing is that even when that person announces it, nobody believes him.”⁷⁶

KRETSCHMER AS ROLE MODEL: *see Ali Sonboly.*

T.J. LANE

27 February 2012

LANE AS ROLE MODEL: *see Jose Reyes.*

ADAM LANZA

14 December 2012

LANZA’S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold, a multitude of mass murderers

Lanza studied mass murderers perhaps more than any other school shooter. He compiled a massive spreadsheet that contained data on five hundred mass murderers.⁷⁷ He also mentioned various school shooters and other killers in his online posts.⁷⁸ According to the official report, he had “an obsession with mass murders, in particular the April 1999 shootings at Columbine High School.”⁷⁹ Lanza’s computer contained “hundreds of documents, images, [and] videos

pertaining to the Columbine H.S. massacre including what appears to be a complete copy of the investigation.”⁸⁰

The official report also noted that Lanza had “a *New York Times* article from February 18, 2008, regarding the school shooting at Northern Illinois University”⁸¹ by Steven Kazmierczak. According to Matthew Lysiak’s book on the Sandy Hook attack, Lanza seemed particularly interested in Kazmierczak.⁸² Other killers Lanza reportedly showed more interest in than most (based on Lysiak’s investigation) included James Holmes, Jared Loughner, Charles Roberts IV, John Allen Muhammad and Lee Boyd Salvo, and Anders Behring Breivik. Also, Lanza’s computer contained Kip Kinkel’s confession⁸³ as well as documents about George Sodini,⁸⁴ Robert Hawkins,⁸⁵ and James Huberty.⁸⁶ In addition, Lanza referred to “the enthusiasm I had back when Virginia Tech happened.”⁸⁷

LANZA AS ROLE MODEL: *see Karl Pierson and Chris Harper-Mercer.*

MARC LÉPINE

6 December 1989

LÉPINE’S ROLE MODELS:

Denis Lortie

In his suicide note, Lépine referred to Denis Lortie.⁸⁸ In 1984, Lortie had stormed the Canadian Parliament in a murderous rampage attack against the government. The reference to Lortie was perhaps Lépine’s way of framing murder as a political act.

Julius Caesar

In addition, Lépine’s suicide note contained a quote that is attributed to Julius Caesar (“*Alea Iacta Est*,” which is Latin for “the die is cast”). Whether or not this is evidence that Caesar was a role model is unknown.

JOHN McLAUGHLIN

24 September 2003

McLAUGHLIN AS ROLE MODEL: *see Jeffrey Weise.*

DUANE MORRISON

27 September 2006

MORRISON AS ROLE MODEL: *see Matthew Murray.*

MATTHEW MURRAY

9 December 2007

MURRAY’S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold, other shooters

Though Murray did not commit a school shooting, he reportedly was influenced by school shooters as well as other killers. Evidence from his computer indicated he had re-

searched school shooters including Harris and Klebold, Seung Hui Cho, and Duane Morrison. He also studied other perpetrators of violence, including Ricky Rodriguez, Sulejman Talovic, and Robert Hawkins.⁸⁹ Murray also posted a message online that was copied from Eric Harris's writings.⁹⁰

JAMES NEWMAN

14 March 2006

NEWMAN'S ROLE MODELS:*Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold, other school shootings*

Newman reportedly "researched Columbine and other school shootings online, and read copies of diaries and journals left behind by Eric Harris and Dyland Klebold." He also told the police that Columbine "kind of inspired me. If they could do it, I thought I could do it."⁹¹

BRYAN OLIVER

10 January 2013

OLIVER'S ROLE MODELS:*Unspecified school shooters*

Oliver reportedly talked with his peers about "school shootings."⁹² I have not found any other details.

Hitler

Oliver also appears to have had a fascination with Hitler and sent a text message stating "I'm right as Hitler was."⁹³

KARL PIERSON

13 December 2013

PIERSON'S ROLE MODELS:*Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold*

Pierson not only studied the attack at Columbine, but made a PowerPoint presentation based on the book, *Columbine: A True Crime Story*, by Jeff Kass.⁹⁴ A search of his computer revealed that Pierson had done online research on Columbine and had downloaded photographs of the school.⁹⁵ In addition, he had a copy of my book *Why Kids Kill: Inside the Minds of School Shooters*,⁹⁶ which includes profiles of ten school shooters. Though he may have studied multiple shooters in the book, his primary influence appears to have been Eric Harris. As I wrote in my article on Pierson:

Pierson's journal echoed the words of Eric Harris. For example, Harris wrote, "I'm full of hate and I love it." Pierson wrote, "I am filled with hate, I love it." Similarly, Harris said, "It's a weird feeling knowing you're going to be dead in two and a half weeks." Pierson wrote, "It's weird going through life knowing that in 19 days, I'm going to be dead." Also, Harris and Klebold referred to their attack as "NBK," which was the abbreviation for

one of their favorite films, *Natural Born Killers*. Like Harris and Klebold, Pierson used the abbreviation "NBK" and he listed the film as one that he liked. In another possible imitation, Pierson wrote "KMFDM" on a test at school when he got a disappointing grade (this may have been meant as an indirect threat to the teacher; the abbreviation is generally translated as "no mercy/pity for the majority"); KMFDM was one of Harris's favorite music groups.

Prior to going on his rampage, Pierson went bowling. This may have been done in imitation of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who allegedly went bowling the morning of their attack. Though this turned out to be false, the idea became widespread, and inspired the title of the film *Bowling for Columbine*.⁹⁷

Adam Lanza

Pierson was interested in the Sandy Hook shootings and not only had photographs of the incident but showed them to his peers. He even thought they were "funny in a crude way."⁹⁸ It was also reported that he "had photoshopped a Korean pop star in the Newtown photos" and thought they were "hilarious."⁹⁹

Other school shootings

Besides having conducted online searches for Columbine and Sandy Hook, Pierson also searched for "school massacres" in general.¹⁰⁰

Julius Caesar, Hannibal, and Hitler

Pierson also appears to have found inspiration in historical figures. Pierson was interested in Hitler and the Nazis and had a swastika as his computer's screensaver.¹⁰¹ He wrote on his arm "Alea Iacta Est," which is Latin for "the die is cast" and is attributed to Julius Caesar.¹⁰² Marc Lépine had also used this quote; whether or not Pierson knew this is unknown. Pierson named his attack Saguntum,¹⁰³ after a town that had been annihilated by Hannibal. The full name of the attack, however, was Saguntum88.¹⁰⁴ As noted above in the section on Seung Hui Cho, "88" could refer to "Heil Hitler."

ROBERT POULIN

27 October 1975

POULIN'S ROLE MODEL:*Michael Slobodian*

Robert Poulin committed his attack on 27 October 1975 at St. Pius X in Ottawa, Ontario. At that time, school shootings were much less frequent than they have since become. Where did Poulin get the idea to commit such an attack? One possibility is that he had read about Michael Slobodian's attack, also in Ontario, that occurred five months earlier (28 May 1975). The authors of the book about Poulin compared the two attacks and believed that Slobodian's attack was a fac-

The reason the two incidents can be related with such certainty is that in the April 7 diary entry, in which the Ottawa youth [i.e., Poulin] mapped out his master plan, there is no mention whatsoever of his school, or any hatred he may have had towards fellow students and teachers. It seems likely that if St. Pius had been part of Robert's plan in April, he would have written about it. Therefore, he may have picked up the idea sometime between April 7 and October.¹⁰⁵

The authors concluded that Poulin got the idea of committing a school shooting after reading about Slobodian's attack. Though this may have likely been the case, there is no solid evidence to confirm it.

JOSE REYES

21 October 2013

REYES'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold, Kip Kinkel, T.J. Lane, the Nazis

Though Reyes was interested in Columbine, his fascination with violence went beyond this one incident. He searched online for information on the Nazis as well as Kip Kinkel.¹⁰⁶ He also used the internet to find photographs of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold in the cafeteria of Columbine High School, music videos that included scenes of the attack at Columbine, and a photograph of school shooter T.J. Lane.¹⁰⁷

CHARLES ROBERTS IV

2 October 2006

ROBERTS AS ROLE MODEL: *see Adam Lanza.*

ELLIOT RODGER

23 May 2014

RODGER'S ROLE MODELS:

Nazis and George Sodini

Rodger did online research on several Nazis, including Hitler, Himmler, and Goebbels. He also researched George Sodini, who committed an attack against women at an LA Fitness center in 2009.¹⁰⁸

JON ROMANO

9 February 2004

ROMANO'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

This is an ambiguous case. On the one hand, Romano left a note about having watched the film *Bowling for Columbine*. On the other hand, after the attack he reportedly wrote, "It was said that I 'studied' Columbine and was trying to repeat it. That's just ridiculous."¹⁰⁹

SAARI'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold, Pekka-Eric Auvinen, Seung Hui Cho

Less than a year after Auvinen's attack, Matti Saari committed another school shooting in Finland. He apparently was influenced by the Columbine killers as well as Auvinen. Regarding his interest in Columbine, "Clips from the 1999 Columbine school shootings in Colorado were listed among his favorite videos."¹¹⁰

As I wrote in an article on Auvinen and Saari:

Saari, like Auvinen, admired Harris and Klebold. In addition, however, he also admired Auvinen. He traveled to Jokela and took photographs of the school where Auvinen committed his rampage. He also bought guns from the same company that Auvinen bought his guns from. And, like Auvinen, he not only shot people but set fires in the school. On the day of his attack, Auvinen wore a shirt that said, "Humanity is overrated." Several days before his attack, Saari got drunk and said to people, "Humanity is overrated."¹¹¹

In addition:

The perpetrator's [Saari's] hair and dressing style had undergone a change during the summer preceding the incident. He now combed his hair back and wore a black leather jacket, which attracted attention. His new style was reminiscent of that of the Jokela school killer [Auvinen].¹¹²

Researchers noted numerous similarities between Saari's and Auvinen's attacks:

There are many indications that Saari was influenced by Auvinen. He followed the same procedure of leaving a media package in Rapidshare, entitled "Massacre in Kauhajoki." He took similar photos of himself with a gun, visited Jokela, and photographed Jokela high school. He ordered a handgun from the Web site of the same shop where Auvinen bought his weapon. They shared the same social network in YouTube.¹¹³

The official report on Saari noted that he used the internet to view "material on the Columbine and Jokela school shootings."¹¹⁴ Another source noted that in 2007, Saari's friends "observed his interest in the Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Jokela shootings."¹¹⁵

MICHAEL SLOBODIAN

28 May 1975

SLOBODIAN AS ROLE MODEL: *see Robert Poulin.*

SMITH'S ROLE MODELS:

Charles Whitman

A few months after Whitman's attack, on 12 November 1966, Robert Benjamin Smith committed his attack. There is no statement from him that he was influenced by Whitman. He said, "I wanted to kill about 40 people so I could make a name for myself. I wanted people to know who I was."¹¹⁶ The fact that just a few months before this Whitman shot over 40 people and achieved instant notoriety, however, raises the possibility that Smith wanted to follow in Whitman's footsteps.

Other role models

Smith also appears to have had other role models for violence, including Julius Caesar, Napoleon, John Wilkes Booth, Jesse James, Lee Harvey Oswald, and Hitler.¹¹⁷

TODD CAMERON SMITH

28 April 1999

SMITH'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

Todd Cameron Smith, whose attack on 28 April 1999, was just eight days after the Columbine shooting, reportedly "alluded to the Littleton massacre" to one or more peers, noting that he had a gun and "thought it would be cool to see what it felt like to shoot somebody."¹¹⁸ Like Harris and Klebold, Smith committed his at lunchtime, and also like Harris and Klebold, he wore a trench coat.¹¹⁹

T.J. SOLOMON

20 May 1999

SOLOMON'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

T.J. Solomon committed his attack just a month after Columbine. Following the shooting at Columbine, he made "a statement to others in reference to Columbine about doing it differently and saying how cool it was."¹²⁰ He reportedly "began to talk about Columbine in odd ways to other people."¹²¹ During a scout meeting in which Columbine was discussed, Solomon said, "I should do something like that," adding that "'it should have happened to our school a long time ago,' that he 'could understand' the Columbine killers 'wanting to shoot the jocks and preps.'"¹²²

Prior to his attack, he had written a statement about why he was doing this, commenting:

For the sake of my brothers and sisters related to the trench coat mafia [a group that in the immediate aftermath of the attack at Columbine it was believed Harris and Klebold belonged to], that will have to remain a mystery to the public eye. I have been planning this for

years, but finally got pissed off enough to really do it.¹²³

After his attack, he explained, "I had just gotten the idea from the shooting at Columbine High School on April 20. So the Monday of the May 20 shooting, I decided to open fire May 20, one month after the Colorado shooting."¹²⁴ In another statement, Solomon "emphasized how much he envied the attention that the Columbine killers got as a result of their deeds. He said that he was thinking of that when he acted."¹²⁵

The assistant prosecuting attorney on the case stated, "Columbine was the trigger that gave T.J. the permission to do it. It showed a way that T.J. could gain power; he could be in control. He envisioned he could be someone; that he could be infamous."¹²⁶

ALI SONBOLY

22 July 2016

SONBOLY'S ROLE MODELS:

Tim Kretschmer and other school shooters

Though Sonboly did not commit a school shooting, there is reason to believe that he found role models among them. First, he owned a copy of my book, *Why Kids Kill: Inside the Minds of School Shooters*.¹²⁷ Whether he was interested in one or more particular shooters, or perpetrators in general, is unknown. More specifically, "Sonboly had visited the scene of a school shooting in the German town of Winnenden in 2009, when Tim Kretschmer, 17, killed 15 people at his former school before fleeing and killing himself."¹²⁸ While there, Sonboly took photographs.

Hitler

Sonboly "boasted to friends that he was proud to be an "Aryan", citing Iran as the land where Aryans originated ... Sonboly boasted of having the same birthday as Hitler, 20 April, saying it was an "accolade."¹²⁹

Anders Breivik

Sonboly also appears to have sought to follow in the footsteps of Norwegian killer Anders Breivik:

police discovered extremist material linked to mass shootings, including the attack by Anders Behring Breivik, the white supremacist who murdered 77 people in Norway in 2011. The massacre in Munich took place on the fifth anniversary of the Norway attacks and Sonboly had recently changed a profile picture on an online messaging service to one of Breivik.¹³⁰

ROBERT STEINHÄUSER

26 April 2002

STEINHÄUSER'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

Steinhäuser reportedly researched Columbine online, discussed the attack with his friends, reportedly was im-

pressed with Harris and Klebold's execution of the attack, and was both appalled but fascinated by photographs of the victims.¹³¹

STEINHÄUSER AS ROLE MODEL: *see Tim Kretschmer and Sebastian Bosse.*

JOSEPH TODD 15 December 1997

TODD AS ROLE MODEL: *see Andrew Golden / Mitchell Johnson.*

SETH TRICKEY 6 December 1999

TRICKEY'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

According to a psychiatrist who evaluated Trickey after his attack, Trickey "was strongly influenced by media accounts of their [Harris and Klebold's] April 20, 1999, rampage ... He started wondering what he would do if he were placed in the role of the perpetrators that were previously depicted on the TV and media."¹³² Elsewhere it was reported that Trickey had "a yearning to know what it was like to be in the shoes of Columbine perpetrators Harris and Klebold."¹³³

General Patton

In addition to the Columbine influence, "Several psychologists who interviewed Trickey said that what pushed him to act was his obsession with military tactics and his identification with World War II Gen. George Patton."¹³⁴

JEFFREY WEISE 21 March 2005

WEISE'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

Weise mentioned Columbine in a short story, but there is no direct indication that his attack was influenced by Harris and Klebold.

John McLaughlin

The same story mentioned the school shooting at Cold Spring, which was an attack by John McLaughlin.¹³⁵ Though McLaughlin's attack has not received the attention of many school shootings, it is not surprising that Weise was aware of it because it occurred in Minnesota, which is where he lived.

Hitler

He also joined a neo-Nazi forum and expressed his admiration for Hitler. His name on the form was "Todesengel," which is German for "Angel of Death."¹³⁶

CHARLES WHITMAN

1 August 1966

WHITMAN'S ROLE MODELS:

In Cold Blood and Richard Speck

As noted by Whitman's biographer, Gary Lavergne, Whitman's decision to commit mass murder may have been influenced by the fact that the book *In Cold Blood* (about a mass murder) was a best-seller in 1966, and less than three weeks before his own attack, Richard Speck committed a mass murder that was called "the crime of the century." Lavergne stated, "The power of mass murder to capture the attention of, to shock, and to break the heart of a nation could not have escaped Charlie."¹³⁷

WHITMAN AS ROLE MODEL: *see Robert Benjamin Smith and Alvaro Castillo.*

ANDY WILLIAMS 5 March 2001

WILLIAMS'S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold

Andy Williams "had told as many as a dozen people he was going to 'pull a Columbine.'"¹³⁸

JAMES WILSON 26 September 1988

WILSON'S ROLE MODELS:

Laurie Dann

On 20 May 1988, Laurie Dann committed a bizarre, multi-faceted rampage attack. On 6 June 1988, *People* magazine published an article about Dann and her rampage.¹³⁹ This article was so fascinating to James Wilson that he tore it out of the magazine and reportedly read it daily until he committed his own attack on 26 September 1988.¹⁴⁰

John Wayne Gacy

In addition, Wilson was fascinated by true crime stories and read a biography of John Wayne Gacy,¹⁴¹ who had killed over thirty men and boys and buried at least some of the bodies on his own property. The morning of Wilson's shooting, he asked his grandmother, "Would you live in a house with thirty bodies buried under it?"¹⁴²

ANDREW WURST 24 April 1998

WURST'S ROLE MODELS:

Andrew Golden / Mitchell Johnson

The Jonesboro attack occurred on 24 March 1998. Shortly after this, Wurst "said he was going to do something like

that someday.” He also remarked, “That Jonesboro thing, that would be like me bringing a gun to the dinner dance.”¹⁴³ Wurst did exactly that – he brought a gun to the school dinner dance and opened fire. He did this on 24 April 1998 – one month to the day after the Jonesboro attack.

Napoleon and Hitler

In addition, Wurst reportedly talked about thinking that Hitler was “cool.”¹⁴⁴ It was also reported that both Hitler and Napoleon were his heroes because of their ability to lead people.¹⁴⁵

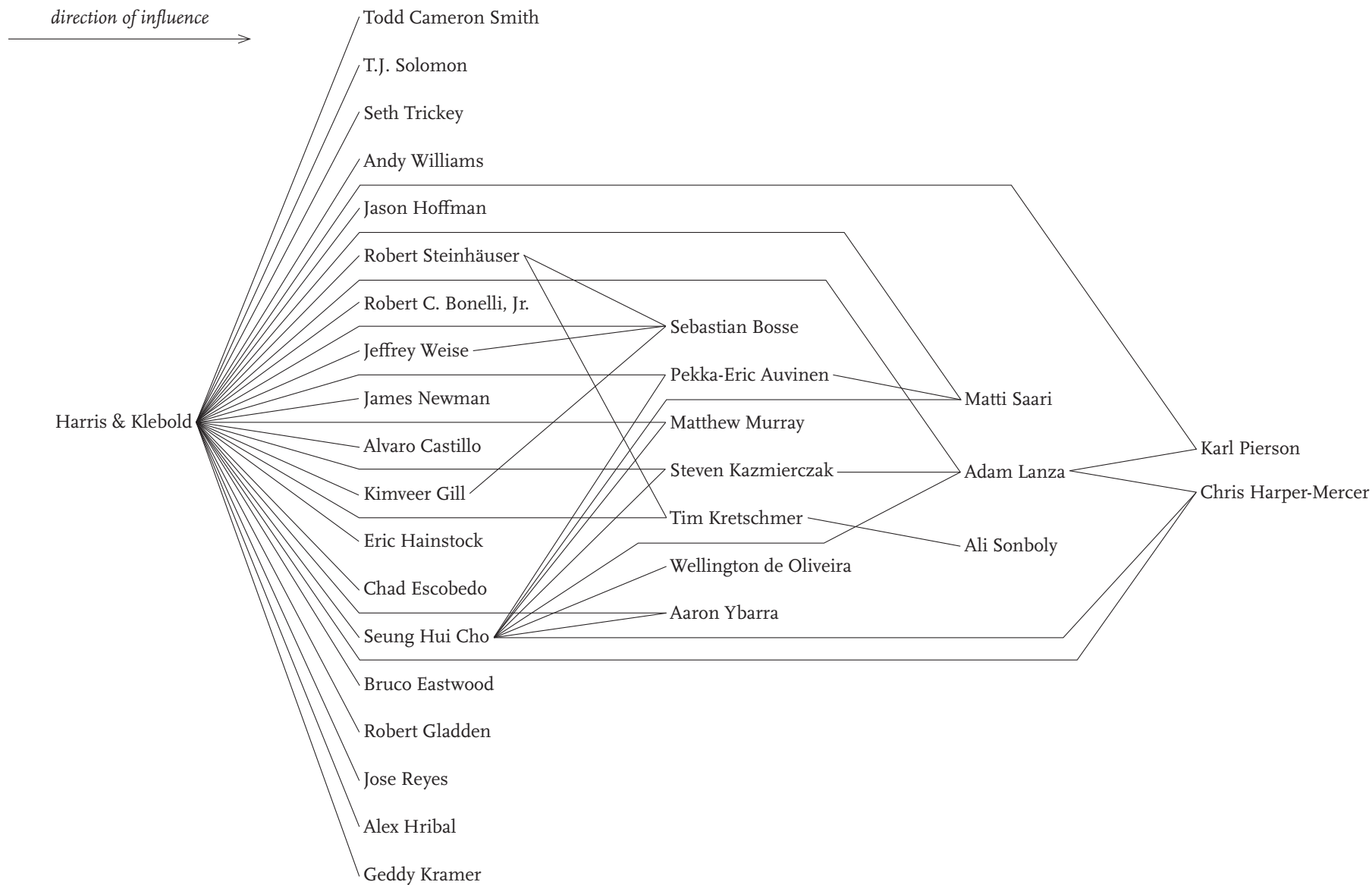
YBARRA’S ROLE MODELS:

Eric Harris / Dylan Klebold, Seung Hui Cho

Ybarra reported being influenced by Eric Harris and Seung Hui Cho. In his journal he wrote, “Since Virginia Tech and Columbine, I’ve been thinking about these a lot. I used to feel bad for the ones who were killed, but now Eric Harris and Seung Hui Cho became my idols. And they guided me til[!] today.”¹⁴⁶ After the attack, Ybarra claimed to have heard the voices of Harris and Cho talking to him.¹⁴⁷ Also after the attack, Ybarra told police “that he had been inspired by the killers in the Columbine shooting and the Virginia Tech shooting.”¹⁴⁸

APPENDIX: THE INFLUENCE OF COLUMBINE

This diagram portrays the apparent lines of influence from Columbine through subsequent attacks. Attacks are arranged chronologically within each column.



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