

The columbine massacre essay sample



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Psychopaths revolve in our worlds, some severely dangerous to the community, others not so much. The shooter of Columbine, Eric Harris portrays the signs of psychopathy extensively. The purpose of this paper is to assess Harris using the PCL-R to determine whether Eric Harris is in fact a psychopath. Writing this paper will conclude if he is psychopathic or not, and to which degree if he is. All of the twenty traits will be assessed to come to a conclusion. The paper will be structured in three main parts; the concept of psychopathy, a description of the traits Eric Harris portrayed and a conclusion of whether or not he is actually a psychopathic. Concept of Psychopathy

The first personality disorder to be recognized in psychiatry (Millon, Simonsen, Birket-Smith & Davis, 1998, pg. vii) was Psychopathy.

Psychopathy is a personality disorder that is compromised of one or more of the following: Psychopathic Personality Disorder, Sociopathy Disorder or Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD). Amongst these three, the broadest range of psychopaths comes from APD. APD is defined as a severe irresponsible and anti-social behavior beginning in childhood and continuing past age eighteen (Passer, Smith, Atkinson, Mitchell & Muir, 2008, pg. 588).

The most effective way to diagnose psychopathy is with Dr. Robert D. Hare's Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) (Hare, 1993) is the psycho-diagnostic tool most commonly used to assess psychopathy (Lynam, 1996, pg. 230).

The checklist has a total of twenty distinct traits. Each item in the PCL-R is scored on a 3-point scale (0, 1, 2) (Patrick, 2006, pg. 58). The cut off score in North America that determines if one is in fact a psychopath is thirty. Causes of Psychopathy

Two specific potential social causes contribute to psychopathy: nature or nurture. Nature indicates that an individual whom is psychopathic is born a true psychopath with no sense of conscience. Recent data suggests that there is indeed a genetic contribution to the emotional dysfunction facilitating antisocial behaviors (Blair, Mitchell & Blair, 2005, p. 29), thus genetic factors greatly stimulus the development of psychopathy. People that are born with psychopathy are known as primary psychopaths (constitutional). Environmental factors affect the specific traits that predominate in an individual. This would be the nurture aspect of being a psychopath. These psychopathy tendencies are triggered later in life by an emotional event (Crim 214, Lecture #3, 2012). This category of individuals have a valid conscience, but it has been turned off. This collection of psychopaths is known as secondary psychopaths (adaptive). Description of Case Study

Eighteen-year-old Eric Harris put an end to his life, and many other lives as well on April 20, 1999. At 11: 35am on the 110th anniversary of Adolf Hitler's birthday, Harris and his companion, Dylan Klebold, killed 13 people and left 25 injured. In Jefferson County, Colorado, the walls of Columbine High school were faced with a rampage. Till this day, Columbine Massacre is the most drastic high school shooting in the world. Harris claimed he was apart of the " Trenchcoat Mafia", hence on the day of this tragic event, he showed up in a long black trench coat with guns and bombs hidden underneath the coat. The initial plan of the two boys had been to kill a minimum of five hundred students and teachers at once. Thus thirty to fifty bombs were planted around the school and were discovered after the mass killings. Fortunately,

the homemade bombs the pair planted around the high school did not all go off. Teacher and coach—Dave Sanders, was literally an angel sent from heaven for many of the students in the school.

This gentleman saved an enormous amount of lives by getting them out of the school in time. Unfortunately, it cost him his own life in the process. The prior Boy Scout laughed and made sarcastic remarks as he gunned down the rest of his fellow peers. The planning of this horrifying act of hate began exactly a year before it was put into play. From April 1998 to April 1999, there have been numerous amounts of evidence found from the planning. Websites, movie clips, notes, pictures and journals have been found in Eric Harris' house. Much of the evidence was in plain view and in dedication to the teachers and students of Columbine High school. He felt he had been done wrong and these were his main reasons for so much of the hatred that was bottled up inside him. The last round of shots went off at 12: 30pm where Harris committed suicide next to his partner, Dylan Klebold in the library.

Description of the Traits

In the mind of Eric Harris, he was unpopular; the jocks made fun of him, the girls rejected him, and many did not like him. However, he was described as just the opposite of that. Psychopaths can be very effective in presenting themselves well and are often very likeable and charming (Hare, 1993, pg. 35). He definitely had a strong glib and superficial charm. Harris influenced his partner Dylan Klebold to help him pursue and achieve his goals. Harris was the mastermind behind the Columbine shooting and was in charge of all of the weapons, the planning, and the information they obtained. One of Harris' first recorded criminal events was possession for stolen articles from

a break and enter into a van. He was sentenced for the conviction and was sent to juvenile detention. He was let out early with a glowing report:

“ Prognosis: Good. Eric is a very bright young man who is likely to succeed in life. He is intelligent enough to achieve lofty goals as long as he stays on task and remains motivated...Recommendations: Successful Termination. Eric should seek out more education at higher levels. He impressed me as being very articulate and intelligent. These are skills that he should grow and use as frequently as possible.” (Cullen, 2009, p. 306).

Eric portrayed himself to be a well-behaved young man, and was able to use his charm to talk his way through the detention very smoothly. His exceptional performance earned him an infrequent early release. Nobody would think that a young boy with only a tiny speck on his criminal record would turn out to be the mastermind behind the Columbine Massacre. It is almost impossible to believe that an intelligent and “ innocent” person like Eric Harris would leave such a lasting impression on the world. Before the shootout itself Harris had only been convicted of one crime, a break and enter, for this, he did his time in a juvenile detention center. The second serious criminal behavior documented would have been the mass murder and suicide. However, he put an end to his life before this horrible incident could have been recorded. As for the criminal versatility, he was very low on the scale. Again, the only convictions were the ones stated above. Along with his charm, Eric was obsessed with himself and had a grandiose sense of self worth Eric Harris’ web name was “ Rebel, Rebdoomer, Rebdomine” (REB). He believed he was “ Ich Bin Gott” (I am God) (Fast, 2008, p. 84). Harris viewed

himself greatly. Eric was definitely sure “ His life will become art and their killings will constitute some kind of a masterpiece” (Fast, 2008, p. 203).

He truly believed that the school shooting would bring him fame from all over the world, and he would get to be a great role model for inspiring people all over the world. Adolf Hitler was his lone role model; he wanted to live up to his standards. Harris desired to be a natural selection just as Hitler appeared to be. Apparently “ Natural Selection needs a boost, like me with a shotgun.” (Fast, 2008, p. 196). However he lacked some planning, as his shooting did not go as intended and he definitely did leave a lasting impression on the world. Eric felt he need to be the “ cool” kid and fit in which contributed to the reasoning of his sense of self-worth and his superficial charm because from the time Eric Harris was born he was put through a series of relocations. He moved to 6 different cities before finally settling down and attending one high school. Unfortunately, the settlement came a bit to late. Every time he would form a relationship with a peer, he would be up and moving once again. As a result, he was not able to form any stable interpersonal relations. When these traits did not do the magic, he turned to being cold and avoidant.

Along with these traits, callous and lack of empathy are the biggest traits in child psychopathy. Eric had no attachments at any early age; as a result he was unable to develop empathetic relations (Crim 214, Lecture 3, 2012).

Early age attachment teaches a child to develop intellectually, develop a conscience, cope with frustration, and become self-reliant and self-valuing (Crim 214, Lecture 3, 2012). The only development Harris was able to achieve was becoming self-reliant and valuing, more than necessary. The

rest had not developed for him in time. This caused him to be avoidant and uncomfortable around people. Manipulation occurs when an individual's main goal is personal gain. A countless number of occasions have been recorded of Harris manipulating people. He could go on for numerous hours about anything while being witty and brilliant, and his prey would believe everything he had to say. This is a strong factor in which why Harris was so successful with following through with the heartless act.

His parents were also blinded by the act he put on for so long. If he ever got into trouble, and by any chance he was caught, he would rant about hurting and losing his respect and trust with his parents. Harris would act depressed and slowly attempt to regain the trust of his parents. As any other parents would upon seeing this, Mr. and Mrs. Harris gave in to him. During one incident, Eric's friend's mother—Mrs. Brooks called Harris out on his behavior lately. Immediately, he had an innocent mask on and asked her if she thought of him as a liar. She was the only person, who did not fall into his trap. Mrs. Brooks countered with “ You know Eric, you can pull the wool over your dad's eyes, but you can't pull the wool over my eyes.” (Fast, 2008, p. 190). He was left stunned. For the first time, his attempt at manipulation was not successful. Manipulating has hints of lying and lying was second nature to Harris. He was dishonest and deceitful to any human that would come across his path. A confrontation by fellow peer Brooks Brown and his mother, were initialized when Eric targeted them. They quickly realized there was something wrong in the way Harris carried himself.

When they brought this situation out in the open with Harris' parents, he stood in the doorway with an innocent look on his face and a fake tone to his

voice (Fast, 2008, p. 190). He countered with “ Mrs. Brown, I didn’t mean any harm, and you know I would never do anything to hurt Brooks.” He easily deceived his parents about this situation and on a daily basis. He boasted about being able to fool his mother and father for just about anything, “ I am going to climb Mt. Everest or I have a twin brother growing out of my back, I say it, they believe it.” (Fast, 2008, p. 202). To make it worse, he openly lied about graduating and finding a better job that would well settle him for the future, although he planned on dying the day of the shooting. He had no such plans of graduating. Lying was the only way Eric knew how to get through his short life. Individuals that lie tend not to care about others feelings, thus Eric unquestionably displayed many signs of shallow affect. Nevertheless, there are three strong separate events that stand out.

The first one is staging a fake suicide. His date for the homecoming did not want to date him any longer, and as payback he “ sprawled on the ground—with fake blood all over him” (Fast, 2008, p. 183). He was so amused by her reaction that he only stopped because he could not control his laughter anymore—not because of his date’s scared reaction. The second situation was when Eric himself stated he would have to “ turn his feeling’s off” in order to follow through with the shooting by desensitizing and dehumanizing himself. Lastly, while Harris was shooting down his peers at Columbine, he would point a gun to his victims and ask them why or why not he should shoot them. Naturally his peers were distraught and scared for their lives but it did not intimidate Harris, because he had no emotions to feel. Shallow affect led to lack of empathy in this situation. Eric was quite open to publicly stating he wanted to shoot or blow everything up, but it was always taken as

a joke. Harris exclaimed numerous times that the only thing he deserves to do is kill and injure as many “pricks” in his school as he can. There is no way an individual that talks like this on a daily basis can have a sense of empathy.

One senior at Columbine walked into the cafeteria and his friends were not fond that particular individual. Very calmly Harris turned his head and said: “Ah yes, I wanna rip his head off and eat it” (Cullen, 2009, p. 285). That is not only lacking empathy, but is mentally disturbing as well. Lastly, and the most disturbing of all was when Eric had a schedule for the day of the shooting and at 11: 16 am—when the shooting was to begin—read: HAHAHA (Fast, 2008, p. 207). Had he shown any traces of empathy, there would have been no Columbine shooting. Eric was certainly mentally ill. There is no doubt about it. Eric did not ever show remorse for his actions. When he caused damage to his friend’s car, he refused to accept responsibility, far from remorse. Harris also felt no signs of remorse when he stole the possessions from the van of someone else. Whether or not he would have felt remorse after the massacre would have been known—had he not killed himself. It is difficult to say he might have felt the tiniest bit of remorse because he had plenty of time to plan this tragic event and to think of the consequences he would leave behind.

He obviously had every intention of committing a crime without empathy or remorse. “Feel no remorse, no sense of shame” (Cullen, 2009, p. 78) is the motto he lived by. The next trait Harris possessed was poor anger control. He was taking Luvox (Fluvoxamine maleate)—an SSRI anti depressant in connection with anger management therapy. Typically Harris expressed his

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anger by writing. His journals, essays, and school projects show evidence of his anger. The writing he left behind was frequently quite descriptive and exposing of his anger. Nonetheless, he would not exhale this anger, right then. Harris would keep it all bottled up and release it abruptly. All of his anger made him feel sorry for himself, thus he alleged, “ self pity turns into rage” (Fast, 2008, p. 202). Early in Harris’ childhood, he associated himself with troublemakers. He would throw “ eggs, teepee, superglue, busyboxes, large amounts of fireworks, break bottles, you name it and we will probably or already have done it.” (Cullen, 2009, p. 147).

He got into a variety of trouble, but it was never enough to receive a criminal record. Eric was sensitive and could not take anyone criticizing him; eventually this led to rebellion. Eric Harris failed to accept responsibility on many occasions. Once again, the van break-in provides evidence for this fact. While Eric was standing trial, he supposedly believed the “ parking ticket on the windshield led him to believe the van was abandoned” (Fast, 2008, p. 192). When the judge decided Harris would be convicted and sent to detention, he automatically threw the entire accuse upon his partner, Dylan. “ Dylan suggesting we should steal some of the objects in the white van” (Fast, 2008, p. 192). Psychopaths are usually spectacular at talking their way out of trouble. Harris was the one that thought of the idea of breaking in into the van. He insists he is not at fault because American is a free land. The idea of detention fazed Eric. He knew stealing is wrong, but he still asked the question, “ How come if I’m free, I can’t deprive a stupid fucking dumbshit from his possessions” (Fast, 2008, p. 195). He refused to accept the responsibility of his actions. Conclusion

One of the major strengths of the PCL-R has been its utility in risk assessment” (Blair, Mitchell, & Blair, 2005, p. 15). The PCL-R assist by with figuring out how likely a psychopathic offender is to reoffend. An assessment implies to which degree offenders are criminally responsible for their actions. Using the PCL-R, the judge has the ability of coming to a conclusion of how accountable they are for their actions. This diagnostic tool proves how intentionally a psychopath committed the conviction and whether or not they were in the right state of mind. Assessing for psychopathy will also determine if an offender is a primary or secondary psychopath. If an individual is born with this disorder, the impact of the sentence may turn out to be different that one of a secondary psychopath. Clearly it is crucial for the PCL-R to be used in court. Undeniably, Eric Harris proved to be an explosive psychopath. Though Harris did not leave hints or traces about the horrifying scar he left upon history, he possessed the traits of an explosive psychopath. He definitely was antisocial and charming, yet these traits were dismissed and were not acknowledged. Had Harris been diagnosed on the PCL-R earlier, he would certainly score in the high thirty’s. Due to the fact that Eric Harris was able to disguise his criminal activity for the entirety of his life, he can be entitled a successful psychopath.

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