

No easy answers in Dawson College shootings

While the media has been quick to point to goth culture, criminologists say the reasons behind tragedy are complex and numerous

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Ontario Bureau Chief

WATERLOO, ONT. (CUP)—Since the fatal shooting at Dawson College in Montréal, many Canadian citizens and officials have been grappling for answers as to why someone would commit such an act.

By most accounts in the media, Kimveer Gill was a 25-year-old loner obsessed with guns and goth culture. He listened to heavy metal and enjoyed a video game entitled Super Columbine Massacre, where users re-enact the actions of Columbine shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. He wore black trench coats, sported a mohawk, and had an online blog on vampirefreaks.com—a web community of self-identified goths. Gill's online postings, which include photos of him holding various weapons, have been a source of intense scrutiny this past week.

"Anger and hatred simmers within me," he wrote in one entry. Other

posts were directed against "jocks," and blamed school staff for "turning a blind eye" towards bullying.

Many people have blamed Gill's connection to the goth scene for his violent turn. But that is a mistake, says University of Toronto sociology professor and criminologist Dr Paula Maurutto.

According to Maurutto, Gill's interests aren't the source of his sinister turn, and it's "almost impossible" to determine the exact reasons for the shooting.

"People are pointing to goth culture, listening to heavy music and violent video games, but the reality is none of that is relevant," Maurutto said. "None of those things are related to criminal behaviour—they're related to rebellious youth behaviour, which is just normal."

"I heard that he wrote about Cocoa Puffs or cheese puffs. Well, why don't we just blame puffs for this?" she asked.

Maurutto explained that there are certain risk factors criminologists can find to aid them in identifying

individuals with potential for violent tendencies. A history of physical or emotional abuse, neglect from teachers or parents, substance abuse, and mental health problems are examples of risk factors. But even still, Maurutto insists that no proper conclusions can be drawn.

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**DR PAULA MAURUTTO,
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
CRIMINOLOGIST**

"What we're doing is guessing. We just don't know why these school homicides happen," she said.

School shootings of this nature are an extremely rare case, says Maurutto, who notes that approximately twelve similar incidents have occurred in Canada in the last 30 years. Having such little data about the phenomenon makes finding answers difficult.

"In all honesty, I would not be able to make a presumption. We don't know what the causes are, so we can't presume to fix it," she said.

Dr Ruth Mann, an assistant professor of Criminology at the University of Windsor, agreed that the causes are not particularly identifiable. Both Mann and Maurutto feel that the key in preventing future attacks is to increase support to mental health and social outreach programs in schools and communities.

"When kids are identified with a mental health issue, getting them service is so difficult," said Mann, who feels that health professionals working with at-risk youth are lacking in numbers and underpaid.

"The new Youth Justice Act has a lot

of rhetoric about prevention, and I'd like to see the government follow up on that," Mann said. "You can't tell a suicidal teen they'll be put on a waiting list."

Maurutto said that Kimveer Gill likely suffered from a mental issue, and hypothesized his potential for danger went undetected because he didn't come in contact with the law or health workers. She added that investing in community and school programs is the only realistic way of preventing another tragedy.

"Most homicidal individuals of this type do give out warning signs," Maurutto said. "There are cries for help and when these cries for help aren't addressed, it reinforces their homicidal urges. My concern is we're going to see politicians cracking down on the Safe Schools Act [the Ontario policy advocating zero-tolerance towards bad behaviour in schools] and getting metal detectors in school—that's just a quick fix."

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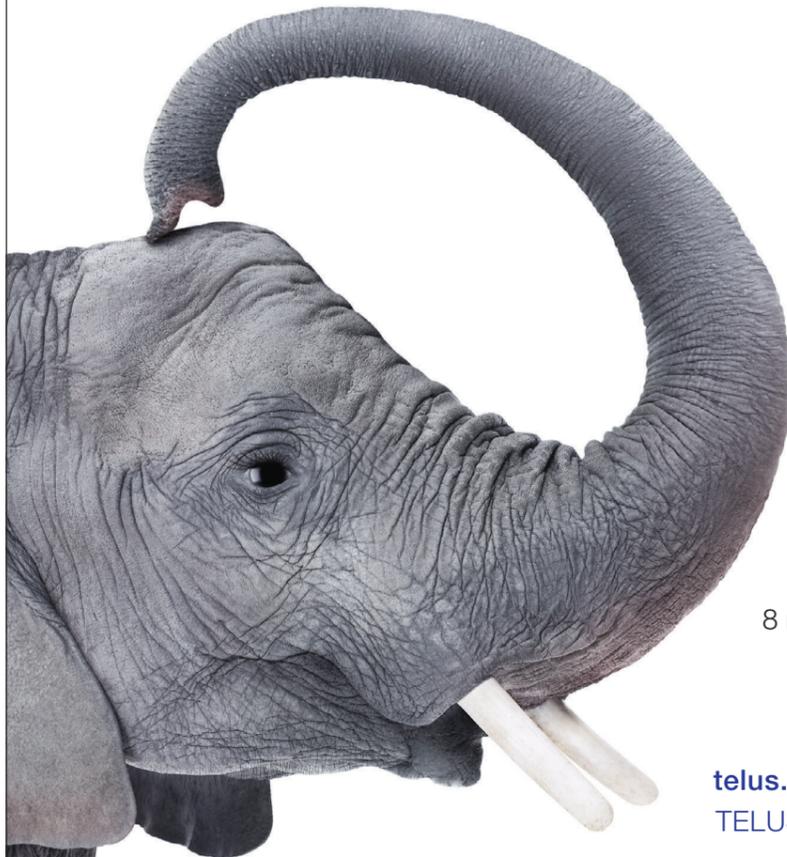


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