

Society has itself to blame for Dawson shooting



PATRICK
ROSS

13 September 2006 is a day that will live in infamy for Canadians. It will be remembered as the day Kimveer Gill, 25, invaded the campus of Montréal's Dawson College, killing one and wounding 19 before ending his own life. Hopefully, it will also be remembered as the day North American society finally woke up to the unwelcome reality underlying such events.

For many people, the shooting at Dawson College revived memories of the December 1989 shootings at *École Polytechnique* in Montréal, in which Marc Lépine slew 14 women before taking his own life.

Lépine, noted for his intense hatred of women, has become an oft-villainized character in Canadian history,

and perhaps rightfully so. But it's also known that Lépine was a victim of child abuse.

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who became infamous following the 20 April, 1999 Columbine Massacre, were well-known social outcasts who had once gone so far as to produce an amateur film in which they shot bullies before carrying out the deed in real life. Eight days after the Columbine incident, Jason Lang was shot dead in Taber, Alberta by a former classmate, who was also known to have been bullied.

Many similar plots have also mercifully been foiled. In 2004, Tobin Kerns, a student at Marshfield High School in Massachusetts was arrested for allegedly plotting a Columbine-style attack. Kerns and Joe Nee, his alleged accomplice-turned-informant, were both known to be social outcasts who were concerned about bullying.

While it certainly is no longer fair or accurate to continue thinking of the perpetrators of acts like this as victims, these events don't happen

spontaneously—they're premeditated acts of suicide. Elliott Leyton, an expert on multiple- and serial-murders, notes that 85 per cent of these individuals are "dead within an hour" of perpetrating their crimes.

Just as fingers were pointed at Marilyn Manson after Columbine, our society will probably take this tragedy as an opportunity to lay the blame everywhere but where it ultimately belongs: with itself.

Suicide, like murder, is a social act, and born out of social conditions such as the disenfranchisement of societal outcasts and the anger and bitterness

that accompanies them. But the connection between these events and the social plight of those who perpetrate them isn't a new revelation. It's well known, and the reaction to such events isn't surprising.

In the days following the shooting, there has naturally been a significant focus on Gill, and, predictably, on the goth subculture of which he was a member. Just as fingers were pointed at Marilyn Manson after Columbine, our society will probably take this tragedy as an opportunity to lay the blame everywhere but where it ultimately belongs: with itself.

Simply put, there's something sincerely wrong with our society when individuals like Kimveer Gill, Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold and Marc Lépine can become so disconnected, isolated, angry and bitter, that the only recourse they can conceive of is to lash out in such a vile manner.

To make matters worse, these same predictable response patterns are hard at work immediately following such tragedies. Before the bodies are even

cold, society is already casting a wary eye at the compatriots of individuals such as Gill, fearfully singling them out as ticking time bombs. This only adds to their isolation, and the seeds of the next school shooting and other violent outbursts are planted.

Perhaps the time has come that society must finally accept responsibility for its misfits. The argument could be made that individuals such as Gill choose to be misfits, wallowing in their isolation and misery instead of doing something about it, but it can be awfully hard when your peers won't even condescend to so much as say "hello" to you. It's time for society to finally recognize that these monsters are born in a very lonely place, and it's one that we as a society have constructed.

On 13 September, at 12:41pm ET, an alarm clock went off for North American society. This time, hopefully we will finally accept this horrific wake-up call instead of just hitting the snooze button until the next tragedy occurs.



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