

The School Massacre in Florida. Media Violence, War Culture

The main causes of recurrent school shootings and the question of potential beneficiaries of the parkland crime (Cui bono?).

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On February 14, at the Parkland High School in Florida (USA), the 19th school shooting took place at a US school in the just-started 2018. It was one of the deadliest: fourteen students and three teachers were literally executed by a 19-year-old former student and dozens more injured.

In a disturbing life video of a student from a classroom, it becomes clear what mental torments young people have to go through in a school massacre: boys in shorts and girls lie huddled in fear under tables and chairs, the jackets pulled over their heads. At short intervals you hear gunfire and a boy screaming in panic:

“Our fu**ing school is getting shot up... O my god! There’s bullet holes in the fu**ing computer... O my god!” (1)

Other students called their parents over cell phones and said goodbye or asked desperately, “Where should I go, what should I do?” Never before have I experienced this insanity so closely and painfully.

Philip Medd, a former CIA and FBI official who as an expert had to drop a CNN interview on a massacre because of a wine spasm, said that this mass murder was not by accident, not by misfortune, but as a consequence of “our inaction”. America is experiencing an “epidemic of mass killings” that cannot be accepted (2).

According to observers in Florida, this Parkland crime is an exact repetition of the school shooting at Erfurt’s Gutenberg High School on April 26, 2002, even as far as the 17 dead are concerned.

On the causes of increasing youth violence and school shootings

As early as the 1970s, the question of how violence originates and how it spreads has been clarified through scientific studies: Aggressive, violent behavior, like all other human behaviors, is learned in the interpersonal relationship and is not innate.

The US scientists **Albert Bandura** and **Richard Walters** have found in their research that **children imitate parents, siblings and playmates. And just as they acquire cognitive and social skills, they also acquire aggressive behavior as early as the**

first years of life. It's a learning on the model.

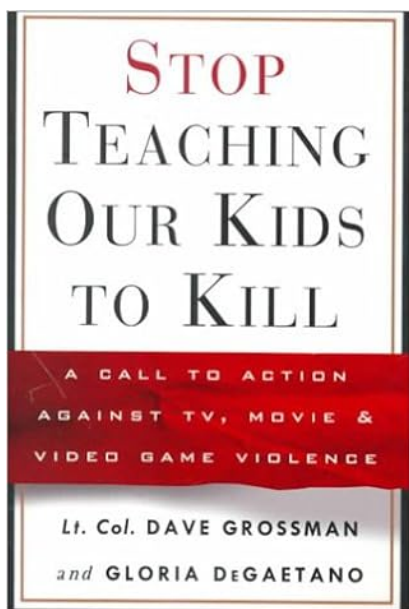
The influence of models is so strong that even children who have no preparedness for aggression take on **the aggressive behavior of role models.** With this explanation certain aggression theories (hypothesis of an aggressive drive, aggression frustration hypothesis) and other theories are refuted as false.

In exploring the causes of increasing youth violence, it is important to highlight the role of the media, especially the violent computer and video games. It has been proven that the increasingly brutal TV and violent games products contribute significantly to the development of child and juvenile delinquency and to the increase of youth violence.

Violent video and computer games (“killer games”) are touted to the youth of the world since the early 1990s by the multi-billion dollar games industry as entertainment and the ultimate “game fun”. They are produced in cooperation with the Pentagon. The internationally recognized US military psychologist **Lt. Col. Dave Grossman**, an expert on the psychology of killing, describes these violence games as “mass murder simulators.

Although serious media impact research was able to eliminate the last doubts already many years ago and lead to conclusive proof that playing violent video games produces more aggressive, less compassionate children – regardless of age, gender, or cultural background (3) –, have the lobbyists of the film and games industry, in association with journalists, politicians and scientists, succeeded over the past decade to unsettle parents, teachers and educators, on the one hand with targeted false statements and on the other hand by questioning solid research results.

Stop Teaching our Kids to Kill



In his book “*Stop Teaching our Kids to Kill*” military expert Dave Grossman provides convincing evidence that violent games are co responsible for school shootings:

“There are three things you need in order to shoot and kill effectively and efficiently. From a soldier in Vietnam to an eleven-year-old in Jonesboro, anyone who does not have all three will essentially fail in any endeavor to kill. First, you need a gun. Next you need the skill to hit target with a gun. And

finally you need the will to use that gun. The gun, the skill, and the will. Of these three factors, the military knows that the killing simulators take care of two out of the three by nurturing both the skill and the will to kill a fellow human being.”(4)

The bitter result of this murder training are then children and adolescents who shoot siblings, parents or their classmates and teachers. In a narcissistic personality, this is usually triggered by alleged insults, rejections and negative interpretations of events. The feeling of being right and restoring justice also plays a role (5).

If the youth then has a weapon available, this narcissistic injury turns into a mass murder with many deaths – as happened recently in Florida.

In addition to the excessive use of violence games, another factor is co-responsible for crimes such as the school shootings: adults must be present in the lives of children and adolescents. Reliable and trusted caregivers are of great importance for the development in childhood and adolescence. The criminologist and psychologist **Hans Joachim Schneider** came to the conclusion:

“If adults are not present in the lives of adolescents, it is also not possible to teach their children adult values such as self-confidence, self-discipline, courtesy, mutual respect, patience, generosity and empathy to others. (...) Empirical research on ‘school shootings’ in the US provides strong evidence of the absence of advice and guidance from adults, and especially from parents.”(6)

Looking now at the superficial coverage in the mass media about the events in Florida, you notice the contradiction to the scientific facts presented. As the causes for the mass murder mentioned in the first place are the liberal US weapons laws, and then factors such as childhood trauma, unjust parents or teachers, psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, spurned love or membership in a shooting club, all of which may be more or less responsible, but are not crucial.

But no politician or expert speaks of the violence- and war culture of the transatlantic “community of values” that forms the learning environment of our children and adolescents? World-wide wars are being waged with devastating consequences for tens of millions of people, and warlords are threatening with impunity other states with atomic annihilation or being bombarded back to the Stone Age if they are not obedient and submit to the hegemon. The role model effect for our youth is correspondingly fatal.

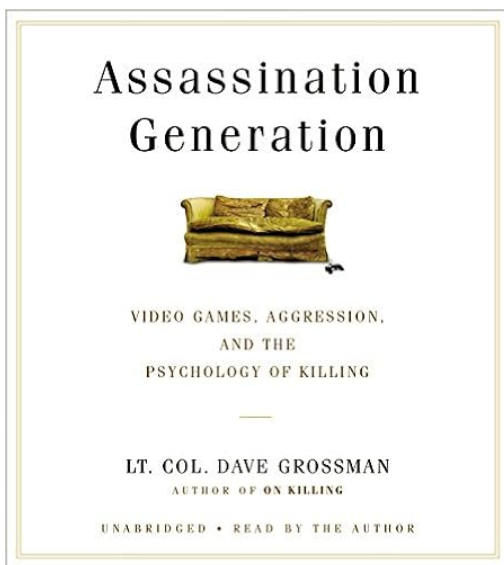
Yet, we are not defenseless to the media violence on television and the violent games. Parents, educators, and teachers would be able to protect children and adolescents from media negligence and social contamination with the violent virus, and to sensitize them to the covert mechanisms of manipulation to see through the “game”. This protection can be achieved through education and restrictive measures.

An essential element is a relationship shaped by the parents and teachers, which strengthens the adolescents. Thus, the child and the adolescent can develop a mental immunity to the flooding with images of violence.

Why do we train a generation of killers?

But the reality is different: In Germany, nearly 40 million people currently play computer and video games. The vast majority of these games are full of repulsive violence, the negative impact on the predominantly male adolescents is drastic. As the Drug Commissioner of the Federal Government stated already in the fall of 2017:

“Teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17 spend an average of about 22 hours per week playing computer games or using the Internet. (...) 5.8 percent of all young people between the ages of 12 and 17 years now show a disturbed Internet or computer game behavior. They have difficulty controlling their play and show withdrawal symptoms such as aggression, withdrawal from everyday life or depression. This is a worrying development, (...)” (7).



Dave Grossman, author of the sensational book *“Assassination Generation. Video Games, Aggression, and the Psychology of Killing”* writes on *“Violent Games and Automatic Control”*:

“Millions of children are training with violent video games every day, and only a few of them will go off and use those skills and conditioned reflexes they learned in the games and commit mass murder. But that should be enough for us to understand that we are doing something very stupid! Never before have we had adolescents capable of committing such mass murders.” (8)

Why do we allow our male adolescents to continue having the opportunity to train killing virtually? Why do we make a generation of killers? For example, former US President Reagan prophesied in the 1980s:

“I’ve recently heard something interesting about video games. Many young people have developed incredible dexterity in hand, eye and brain coordination in these games. The Air Force believes these kids will be exceptionally good pilots once they fly our jets.”(9)

Cui bono?

In the field of criminalistics and history, it has become the principle to ask about the

beneficiaries of certain events or actions, especially in the case of crimes: Cui bono? Whose advantage or benefit? The Roman philosopher and playwright **Lucius Annaeus Seneca** (1 to 65 AD) used the expression slightly modified in his tragedy Medea: "*Cui prodest scelus, is fecit*" - "*To whom the crime benefits, he has committed it.*" But first things first.

Just one day after the massacre, allegations were made at a press conference in Parkland against the US Federal Police FBI: The massacre was not prevented despite clear indications and warnings. Already in September 2017, the FBI is said to have received a reference to the student **Nikolas Cruz**, the later assassin. He had announced his act under a YouTube video with the words: "*I will be a professional school assassin.*" (10) However, the investigation by the FBI remained inconclusive.

On January 5, 2018, the FBI got a phone call with very concrete references to the perpetrator. The caller is said to know Nikolas Cruz well and to have pointed out his infatuation with weapons and the planning of a possible attack on a school. The FBI was hence very concretely warned of the assassin, but has admitted to not have followed the indication.

Even the school board of the concerned high school has warned of Nikolas Cruz and gave him house ban. Many students have already feared, according to TV reports that he would return as an avenger, because he had to leave school some time ago due to disciplinary difficulties.

As an expert on the prevention of school and media violence, who has after the school shooting in Germany spent many years working on the issue of preventing such crimes as a school counselor and school psychologist, I already asked myself at that time: Why has the FBI done nothing, despite all the warnings, to protect the more than 3,000 grade 9-12 students and the more than 120 high school teachers from the 19-year-old gunfool?

Also, I wondered if this school massacre with 17 dead maybe should not be prevented. But for what reason and whose benefit (Cui bono)? Should this crime possibly pressure the US president to intensify the liberal arms laws? However, because of the monstrosity of such a crime, I found my suspicions too premature.

The grief has turned into a national rebellion of teenagers.

But already a few days later, evidence of possible beneficiaries of the crime condensed. Almost all mainstream media reported that the massacre could possibly have been prevented if the FBI had not failed. The governor of Florida demanded the resignation of the FBI Director.

Two days after the assassination, the US President visited the relatives of the victims and the survivors in the hospital. He emphasized that the culprit had been mentally ill. He did not speak about intensifying the gun laws. That was expected of him. But he already did not do that on his TV appearances in the days before.

On February 18, then, the media reports from Florida almost overturned in the conviction of Trump as the National Rifle Association (NRA) man. *Spiegel Online*, under the headline "*Amok survivors to Trump: Shame on you*", reported that the young surviving student **Emma Gonzales** had made serious allegations against President Trump and that her anger speech was spreading rapidly on social media:

“Shame on you”, cried Emma Gonzales at an anti-gun demonstration in Fort Lauderdale attended by hundreds of students. (...) She also criticized Trump for accepting funds from the NRA in the 2016 presidential campaign. (...)“Shame on you, shame on you,” chanted the demonstrators.”(11)

17-year-old **David Hogg** told the president that Trump should stop vacationing in Mar-a-Lago and instead do something and set out laws to save lives: *“Children die and the blood sticks to your hands as well.”* (12)

The grief turned into rage, headlined the online edition of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, reporting that students, parents and teachers in Florida demonstrated and chanted for stricter gun laws: *“Enough is enough”* and *“shame on you”* (13).

On February 19, Spiegel online was already talking about a *“rebellion of teenagers”*. The so-called Columbine generation (named after the US school massacre in 1999) wants to fight and do something with demonstrations, with TV interviews, with protest calls on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snap chat. For March 24, students have called for a nationwide *“anti-arms march”* in Washington. America’s teachers would follow with a general strike (14).

There is nothing more to say about this process right now. The further development will either confirm the expressed initial suspicion of the *“cui bono?”* or it must be rejected. Also, we will see how the US President reacts to the nationwide protests and allegations of the youth.

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Notes

(1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9GqnSzNHAW>.

(2) Mitschrift eines Videos in:

<http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/florida-massaker-an-highschool-toedlicher-angriff-am-valentinstag-a-1193583.html>.

(3) Hänsel, R. (2011). Game over! Wie Killerspiele unsere Jugend manipulieren, S. 29 f.

(4) Grossman, D. / DeGaetano, G. (2002). Wer hat unseren Kindern das Töten beigebracht? Ein Aufruf gegen Gewalt in Fernsehen, Film und Computerspielen. Stuttgart, S. 86.

(5) Vgl. Füllgrabe, U. Gewaltförderung durch falsche Paradigmen. *reportpsychologie* 1/2007, S. 12-27.

(6) Schneider, H. J. Delinquenz Jugendlicher. In: *Kriminalistik* 4/2000, S. 26.

(7) Die Drogenbeauftragte der Bundesregierung, „Gemeinsame Pressemitteilung gamescom 2017: Exzessive Mediennutzung birgt Risiken – Zahl der computerabhängigen Jugendlichen steigt“ vom 21.08.2017.

(8) Grossman, D. / Christensen, L. W. Gewaltspiele und automatische Steuerung. In: Hänsel, R. / Hänsel,

R. (Hrsg.) (2006²). Da spiel ich nicht mit! Auswirkungen von „Unterhaltungsgewalt“ in Fernsehen, Video- und Computerspielen – und was man dagegen tun kann. Eine Handreichung für Lehrer und Eltern. Donauwörth.

(9) Hänsel, R. (2011). Game over! Wie Killerspiele unsere Jugend manipulieren, S. 56.

(10) <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/florida-fbi-wurde-vor-amoklauf-von-parkland-gewarnt-a-1194003.html>.

(11) <http://www.spiegel.de/lebenundlernen/schule/amoklauf-in-florida-schuelerin-kritisiert-donald-trump-a-1194096.html>.

(12) <http://www.spiegel.de/lebenundlernen/schule/amoklauf-in-parkland-florida-schueler-fordern-stroengere-waffengesetze-in-usa-a-1194163.html>.

(13) <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/panorama/2.220/nach-amoklauf-an-us-schule-wie-trauer-in-wut-umschlaegt-1.3871921>.

(14) <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/florida-amoklauf-und-das-us-waffenrecht-der-aufstand-defr-teenager-a-1194184.html>.

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